

Du Pont taken into custody

NEWTOWN SQUARE (R) — Millionaire John du Pont, accused of killing an Olympic champion wrestler, was captured by police on Sunday, ending a 48-hour siege at his mansion, officials said. "They got him," said Delaware County Emergency spokesman Bill Lovejoy. "It's over and he is alive." A Reuters photographer said Mr. Du Pont was taken to a police station by a heavily armed rapid response team after being taken from the mansion by a back gate. Police said Mr. Du Pont was captured outside his home. Mr. Du Pont is alleged to have killed David Schultz, who won a gold medal at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics in the freestyle class, on Friday with two shots to the chest. Schultz lived with his wife and children in a house on the grounds of Mr. Du Pont's 800-acre Foxcatcher estate. Shortly before the end of the drama, police moved spectators and media from the entrance to the estate and a windowless black van drove in.

Jordan Times

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 جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية. الراي

Iraq names new head for U.N. contacts

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraq has named a new head of the Military Industrialisation Organisation (MIO), whose job includes talks with U.N. officials trying to dismantle Iraq's banned weapons, the press said Sunday. Dhiif Abdul Majid Ahmad replaced General Amer Al Rasheed, the oil minister who ran the MIO since President Saddam Hussein's son-in-law and weapons architect Hussein Kamel defected to Jordan last August. Mr. Abdul Majid Ahmad, who was assistant MIO chief until he assumed his new duties on Saturday, told the official Iraqi press he "will pursue the task of my predecessor to strengthen Iraq's struggle." No reason was given for the move. Iraq on Jan. 19 accepted an invitation from U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali to join talks on implementing a U.N. measure allowing Iraq to export some oil to buy food and medicine. No date has been set for the talks. Iraq meanwhile invited Syria to respond to President Saddam Hussein's call for reconciliation with the Arab states which fought against Baghdad in the 1991 Gulf war.

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Jordan reaffirms total support for Palestinian rights

Kingdom, PNA give a new impetus to cooperation in talks held here by Arafat

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat ended a 20-hour visit to Jordan on Sunday after talks described to have given a boost to Jordanian-Palestinian cooperation and a Jordanian reaffirmation of the Kingdom's support for the Palestinians in negotiations beginning in May on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

An expected meeting between Mr. Arafat, the newly-elected Palestinian president, and Amman-based members of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) failed to take place and no immediate comment was available on why it did not take place.

His Majesty King Hussein, who received and saw off Mr. Arafat, held two rounds of talks with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chairman, Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker also met with Mr. Arafat at the Prime Ministry.

The King, who met Mr. Arafat at the Guest Palace on Sunday, described the meeting as frank and brotherly and said the talks were good and fruitful. The meeting was "a continuation of the unique relationship that we will always be proud of," said the King.

The King reiterated Jordan's support for the Palesti-

nian people's quest to regain their rights on their national soil in the final status negotiations with Israel.

"We will support our Palestinian brethren by all means available to us," the King said. "Jerusalem has a special place and we all have great feelings towards it. Our position will be one through which we can ensure our full rights and (to ensure that) Jerusalem remains the symbol of peace."

Jordan supports the Palestinian quest to set up an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, the King reaffirmed.

The King also referred to the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations and expressed hope that they would yield positive results so that the entire Middle East region could enjoy a just and lasting peace and everyone will have the right to a bright and promising future.

Mr. Arafat thanked the King for his continuous support and his efforts to restore Arab unity and solidarity. He also expressed gratitude for Jordan's help for the Palestinians to rebuild their infrastructure.

In comments after the prime ministry meeting, Mr. Arafat told reporters that his talks reflected the "depth and strength" of Jordanian-Palestinian relations and that the two sides would also seek

to restore Arab solidarity.

"King Hussein told me not to hesitate in asking for Jordan's help not only economically but also politically," Mr. Arafat told reporters.

Mr. Arafat, who left for Sweden, where he will receive a prize for his contribution to Middle East peace, said Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) agreed to give a new impetus to cooperation, particularly in areas where the two sides have signed agreements.

"We have decided to activate the joint working groups at all levels," said Mr. Arafat, paying his first visit to Jordan after the Jan. 20 elections that saw him becoming the first elected president of the Palestinians and his Fateh group emerging as the largest bloc in an 88-member self-rule council in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Jordan and the PNA have set up several working groups in line with the series of bilateral agreements they have signed on cooperation in various sectors. However, the pace of cooperation, officials say, had been slow mainly because of the PNA's preoccupation with the Jan. 20 elections.

Mr. Arafat said he expected the announcement soon of joint Jordanian-

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His Majesty King Hussein, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker, Royal Court Chief Marwan Al Qasem and other officials with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Amman on Sunday (Photo by Yousef Allan)

Deputies trade insults during House debate

By Sa'eda Kilani
 Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A fierce dispute between the government and the opposition over division of power between the judiciary and the legislative escalated into uncontrollable personal confrontations during the Lower House's regular Sunday session.

The dispute started between Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Abdul Raouf Rawabdeh and Islamic Action Front (IAF) deputy Abdul Munem Abu Zant (Amman) when the latter insisted on the legislative authority's right to discuss the case of Leith Shbeilat, currently detained for lese majeste, under the dome.

While Mr. Rawabdeh said that Parliament should not tackle a case currently in court, opposition deputies contended that the legislative should have the powers to do so.

But the dispute later developed into a verbal fracas. Sheikh Abu Zant insisted on his right to speak out about Mr. Shbeilat's case when lawmakers were discussing the House's draft bylaws. Sheikh Abu Zant protested to a paragraph in one of the bylaws that stipulates that deputies should be brief in their cross examination of ministers' replies to their questions. He proposed that the paragraph be taken out. But Mr. Rawabdeh strongly objected to the sheikh's proposal

arguing that deputies would use the House's time to give long-winded speeches.

"If the deputy's remarks were taken for rhetoric, then..." Sheikh Abu Zant started only to be interrupted by Deputy Abdul Karim Dughni (centrist from Mafrak).

"We know you and we know your stupidities," Mr. Dughni said.

"Sbut him up," demanded Mr. Rawabdeh from the House speaker referring to Sheikh Abu Zant's incessant remarks and proposals. IAF spokesperson Hamzeh Mansour tried to intervene but in vain. "This is not acceptable," he said.

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Proposed law to increase seats in Parliament to 100

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government is proposing a new Election Law that would raise the number of deputies in the next (13th) Parliament to 100 from the present 80, reports published by local newspapers yesterday said.

According to the reports, the current 20 electoral constituencies will be raised to 32 and the voting age will be reduced from 19 to 18. Amman, the largest constituency with a population of 1.4 million, will gain five seats in the new Parliament (22 from 17).

Madaba (population 102,560), which used to be part of the six Amman constituencies, will become a separate electoral district with three seats, one reserved for Christians.

Mafrak and Tafleeh, with populations of 169,883 and 61,264 respectively, will retain three seats each. Aqaba (population 67,808) and Maan (population 73,861), which used to be one constituency with five seats, will split into two districts with two seats for the former and four for the latter.

Irbid, which has nine seats in the current Parliament, will gain two more seats.

Jerash and Ramtha districts will gain one seat each, thus increasing the number of their deputies to three and four respectively. The North-east Aghwar district will gain two more seats from the present two. Ajloun will retain three seats, one reserved for Christians.

Zarqa would gain three seats and will have nine.

The bedouins, divided into three tribal groupings in the north, centre and south of the Kingdom, will gain three seats on top of the present six. Each tribal area will have three seats instead of two. The latest 1994 census results released on Saturday did not provide population figures for bedouins.

Christians will also have extra seats in the next Parliament after the draft law passes through the legislature.

According to the government proposal, seats allocated to Christians will increase from nine in the current Parliament to 11.

One of the two extra seats goes to Amman and the other to Irbid.

Chechens and Circassians retain three seats, two in Amman and one in Zarqa.

Assad, Hrawi voice peace commitment

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syrian President Hafez Al Assad and his Lebanese counterpart Elias Hrawi reaffirmed their commitment to a "just" peace in the Middle East after talks here Sunday.

The two leaders said they were "committed to a just and comprehensive peace based on international resolutions," Mr. Assad's spokesman Jibril Kouriyeh said.

They also said they were "satisfied by coordination" between their two countries in the peace process with Israel.

Lebanon has said it will resume its talks with Israel, which have been frozen for two years, once Syria has made substantial progress in its own search for a peace deal with the Jewish state.

Their meeting came as Syrian and Israeli negotiators were to hold an unscheduled meeting Sunday in Washington amid growing pessimism over the chances of any breakthrough in their talks.

Mr. Hrawi arrived here Saturday at the head of a high-ranking delegation for the annual meeting of the Lebanese-Syrian Higher Council — set up after Leba-

non and Syria signed a treaty of "brotherhood, coordination and cooperation" in 1991.

Mr. Kouriyeh said the council decided to draw up an action plan to boost cooperation between the two countries.

Mr. Hrawi and Mr. Assad then met for one-to-one talks on the Arab-Israeli peace process, before the Lebanese president left for Beirut.

The Syrian Al Baath, mouthpiece of the ruling party, said peace efforts had to concentrate on "the Lebanese-Israeli track" and that Lebanon and Syria would advance together in the peace process.

"Israel must withdraw from the Golan as well as southern Lebanon," the daily Tishrin said, repeating the long-held Syrian position.

Syria and Israel ended a new three-day round of talks in Wye Plantation, Maryland, on Friday.

But Israel's ambassador to Washington, Itamar Rabinovich, said Israeli chief negotiator Uri Savir and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Mualllem, were to meet Sunday for "intensive" contacts to try to get

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Bahrain invites King to visit

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Sunday received a telephone call from Bahraini leader Sheikh Isa Ben Khalifa, voicing his country's appreciation to Jordan for its continuous support for Bahrain. Sheikh Isa expressed appreciation of King Hussein's position towards the recent events in Bahrain and extended an invitation to the King to visit Bahrain.

Hamas activist said denied entry

AMMAN (J.T.) — Sheikh Jamil Hamami, a representative of the Hamas movement in the West Bank, was denied entry to the Kingdom on Sunday by Jordanian authorities, according to a Palestinian delegation that arrived here yesterday upon invitation from the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. Mr. Hamami, was invited to deliver a lecture on the Jan. 20 Palestinian elections along with three other colleagues. "We wanted to go back too in protest but we saw that we should make it a point to the Jordanian public," said Mahdi Abdul Hadi, president of the Jerusalem-based Society for International Studies. "It is time we open the doors. It is the Jordanian public who lost the opportunity" to listen to what Hamas had to say about the elections, he said.

Jordanian killed in UAE accident

ABU DHABI (AFP) — A Jordanian engineer was crushed to death when a 12-tonne pneumatic roller ran over him pressing him into burning hot asphalt being laid for a new road here, the Gulf News daily said Sunday. Kamal Abu Hileh was crushed on Saturday as he stood supervising the work with his back to the roller when the driver started reversing without looking back, workers told the newspaper.

Palestinian efforts under way for 'coalition for democracy'

By Lamis K. Andoni
 Special to the Jordan Times

EAST JERUSALEM

Less than a week after the announcement of the results of the Palestinian legislative council elections, leading independents have started deliberations with non-conformist Fateh deputies to form a bloc that promotes democracy, social justice and will seek to alter the Palestinian negotiating strategy with Israel.

Haider Abdul Shafi and Abdul Jawad Saleh have been deliberating with independents and a number of Fateh deputies in an effort to form a bloc that will prevent the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) from totally dominating the council.

The success of these efforts will highly depend on the readiness of Fateh deputies who had defied Yasser Arafat's orders not to contest the elections to form coalitions outside the Fateh movement, observers say.

Fateh "independents," as the deputies who ran outside the Fateh official call themselves, say they are open for cooperation with independents, especially that their victory without support from Mr. Arafat had gained them new strength and independence.

If such a bloc is formed, divisions within Fateh that have been deepened during the election campaign will take a new form, breaking Mr. Arafat's expected grip

on a council dominated by his movement.

Fateh officials and political analysts believe that Fateh will be divided to at least two blocs tied to public and private interest groups outside the council unless Mr. Arafat succeeds in coopting "the rebellious deputies."

Mr. Arafat has successfully coopted a good number of the young leaders of the infitah through political appointments in PNA departments and security agencies.

But some of these young leaders had remained defiant and contested the elections in spite of orders to pull out. Two of the representatives of this

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PNA and Hamas enter new accord

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Yasser Arafat, boosted by his landslide victory in Palestinian elections, has ordered the release of the Hamas militants and allowed his main powerful opposition group to open offices and a newspaper, officials said Sunday.

Under the reconciliation pact, Mr. Arafat authorised the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas to open an office in Gaza City and to launch an official newspaper, officials from Hamas and Mr. Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA) said.

He also ordered the release early Sunday of 15 militants, including leading Hamas figure Sheikh Ahmad Nimr Hamdan, Hamas officials said.

In exchange, Mr. Arafat demanded that Hamas continue to refrain from "any activities that could embarrass the authority," a reference to anti-Israeli attacks launched from PNA-controlled territory, Palestinian sources said.

Mr. Hamdan was thrown into a Palestinian jail more than two months ago after a speech during Friday prayers here in which he sharply criticised Mr. Arafat and Hamas leaders who wanted to reach

a reconciliation with the PNA. Hamas and PNA officials said Mr. Arafat ordered the release of the Hamas members after a 90-minute meeting late Friday with three senior leaders of the Islamic movement: Mahmoud Al Zahar, Sayyed Abu Mesameh and Mohammad Shama.

The officials said that as part of the agreement, Hamas and the PNA set up a liaison committee to resolve differences and prepare for municipal elections tentatively scheduled for May.

The committee held a first meeting Saturday to follow up on an initial round of reconciliation talks between the PNA and Hamas late last year in Cairo. Further discussions were planned for later Sunday, the officials said.

Saturday's meeting was attended by the three Hamas leaders, all of whom took part in the Cairo talks, and by a PNA delegation that included PNA Secretary-General Tayeb Abdul Rahim, PNA military intelligence chief Musa Arafat and Gaza police chief Ghazi Jabali.

A Hamas official said

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Ethiopian Jews protest Israeli 'racism' over blood donations

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — Israeli police fired rubber bullets and tear gas Sunday against thousands of Ethiopian Jews trying to break into Prime Minister Shimon Peres' office in protest against "official discrimination," police said.

In a melee lasting several hours, protesters pelted police with stones, bottles and other objects and tried to break through barriers to get into the prime minister's offices.

"Police were obliged to use force to disperse the protesters, including tear gas and high pressure water cannon, and in the end had no choice but to use rubber bullets," police spokesman Eric Bar-Chen said.

He could not say if anyone was hurt by the rubber bullets, which he said were "used as a last resort and in limited quantity."

Israel Radio said dozens of protesters were injured and Mr. Bar-Chen said 30 policemen were hurt, some of them with fractured bones.

Mr. Bar-Chen said much damage was caused to cars parked near the prime minister's office, where a pall of tear gas covered the entire neighbourhood.

The protest was called by Israel's Ethiopian community to protest a reported government policy of systematically destroying blood donations given by Ethiopians out of fear they are contaminated by AIDS.

"Although our skin is black, our blood is red as yours and we are just as Jewish as you are," one placard read. "Apartheid in Israel" was the red-lettered slogan on a white banner.

The area outside Mr. Peres' office became a battlefield as police repeatedly

used tear gas and water cannon against demonstrators who tried to storm the compound where the cabinet was holding its weekly meeting.

"The use of gas was the only means by which I could prevent them from bursting into the prime minister's office and perhaps attacking ministers," police chief Arye Amit told reporters.

After several hours of violence, Mr. Peres met a delegation of protestors. His office later announced the government would set up a committee to look into their complaints.

"He apologised in the name of the government and on his own behalf, even though none of the government members knew about (the discarding of blood donations). And he praised the Ethiopian immigrants."

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Royal Jordanian has the pleasure to announce the introduction of a new service the "Advance Boarding Pass" at its Intercon. Housing Bank and Abdali offices. It is also available at its offices in Zarka and Irbid.

This "ABP" service allows RJ passengers to receive their Boarding Passes, seat assignments and pay their Airport Tax at RJ offices within (24) hours and until (3) hours prior to departure time.

This service applies to the following destinations: New York, Chicago, London, Berlin, Frankfurt and Amsterdam.

Afghan peace drives plenty, but nothing really changes

KABUL (AFP) — Hopes of ending the Afghan civil war seem to be fading fast as a set of new peace drives aimed at reconciling the country's warring factions appears to have hit a deadlock, analysts here said.

"Things appear to have boiled down into a stalemate again, although over recent weeks many of us had started to believe that some real progress was being made diplomatically," a foreign analyst said.

Similar downbeat comments by other international observers here come after a spate of relative optimism that a peaceful solution could be found towards resolving at least some of Afghanistan's factional conflicts.

In December, beleaguered President Burhanuddin Rabbani made an unprecedented offer to travel to the provincial strongholds of other warring factions to negotiate terms for a new broad-based government.

Shortly afterwards, a top-level Kabul delegation flew to the northern base of Rabbani's arch rival, Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, for talks which officials said marked a "major and basic" improvement in relations between them.

Despite the talks and a barrage of rumours about an imminent peace pact with Gen. Dostum, no such accord has been signed, nor does it seem likely that one would be in the foreseeable future.

Gen. Dostum ruled out such a deal. The move would have significantly shifted the precarious balance of power in the government's favour. Meanwhile, the Taliban movement, which has been besieging war-torn Kabul for the past four months, at first roundly rejected holding talks with the government but has since softened its tone.

A government delegation is now preparing to go to the southern city of Kandahar for talks with the Taliban student militia's leadership, who have vowed to topple Mr. Rabbani, officials here said.

Analysts say it is very unlikely that any real progress would be made in such talks. "The Taliban are still motivated by belief that they have a God-given mission to take control of the whole country, and therefore they are not yet ready to make concessions," one foreign observer, who requested anonymity, said.

"Until they realise that they probably cannot seize Kabul, they are extremely unlikely to compromise on any significant point and have in the past refused to negotiate with other factions," he added.

One group, the opposition Shiite Muslim Hezb-e-Wahdat faction, has struck a ceasefire accord with their erstwhile enemies in Kabul, but observers say the real results of the pact will be negligible.

"Traditionally in Afghanistan, peace and concessions are hardly ever achieved through talks," the observer said. "Talks are usually used as a short-term alternative to fighting and don't create progress by themselves."

Even U.N. peace envoy Mahmoud Mestiri's recently renewed mission seems to lack sparkle.

Another analyst commented that as Mr. Mestiri's mission had not achieved any lasting progress in reconciling the warring groups over the past two years, it was unlikely that it would yield results soon.

The government, the other factions and the people of Afghanistan appear to have lost confidence in the U.N. effort and don't seem ready to compromise on anything he suggests," he observed.

As efforts to gain political agreement gather pace, rocket and artillery strikes blamed by the government on the Taliban have continued to batter civilian areas of Kabul.

Although the frontlines have scarcely changed in months, tension runs high around the city and routine artillery skirmishes between the two sides hardly cease.

"All factions talk about peace to please their followers here and to curry favour abroad, but in reality the fight is no longer about ideology, it's about struggling for power," one disillusioned local academic said.

Despite the apparently gloomy outlook for peace after three years of bloody civil war, a veteran political watcher here said: "It's dangerous to rule out anything here because in Afghanistan's history the most remarkable things have always happened when no-one expected them."

Reuters adds: Traders have brought supply trucks into the besieged Afghan capital, Kabul, for the first time in nearly two weeks, a government spokesman said on Sunday.

He said a convoy of 300 trucks arrived on Saturday after being held up for 13 days east of the opposition-held town of Sarobi, on the road to the eastern city of Jalalabad.

"The road is now officially open," he said. "Supplies will continue to reach the city." However, drivers arriving at one of Kabul's main markets said only around 100 trucks had been allowed through.

"They let us go because we were blocking the road," said one driver, adding that commanders within the rebel Hezb-e-Islami militia had extracted a toll of \$400 for each vehicle.

Fighting between government and opposition forces has kept roads to the south, west and north closed for many months. Disputes within Hezb-e-Islami on how to tax traffic are said to be behind the recent disruption to the Jalalabad route.

The road, linking Kabul to Pakistan, had carried most of Kabul's food and fuel supplies. But for a fortnight guerrilla commanders have stopped aid and trade convoys, though passengers have been let through.

The coordinator of the U.N. Office for Humanitarian Assistance for Afghanistan, Martin Barber, said on Thursday that U.N. food stocks, used to support needy segments of Kabul's population, would run out in two weeks unless roads reopened.

Minister of higher education rejects charges of nepotism in appointments

By Sa'eda Kilani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Minister of Higher Education Rabea Saoud on Sunday defended himself against accusations of nepotism levelled by parliamentarians.

Dr. Saoud (a Tafleeh deputy) said that the charges were completely baseless and stressed that the case has been referred to the prosecutor general.

The allegations, first published in the weekly tabloid Sawt Al Mara'a (woman's voice) two weeks ago, were raised by Islamic Action Front Deputy Abdul Rahim Ekour (Irbid) during the Lower House of Parliament session on Sunday. Sheikh Ekour demanded an explanation from Mr. Saoud on the authenticity of the report that he favoured relatives and supporters in appointments in his ministry.

"There are basic considerations for the nomination and appointment of education attaches," Dr. Saoud said. "The minister cannot possibly appoint all employees to the post."

"It is not true that those who have been appointed were appointed simply because they were my constituents. They are competent," Dr. Saoud said. "I have documents to prove this."

and negate all that has been published in the press about the issue."

Dr. Saoud said that the case was now in the hands of the prosecutor general.

Another Islamist deputy, Basam Emoush (Zarqa), charged that the government also exploits its powers. He claimed that the former mayor of Zarqa, Yasser Omani, was forced by Zarqa Governor Misha Tarawneh to give some "individuals" kiosks that should be given to poor people only.

"These actions are not acceptable," Dr. Emoush said. "These kiosks are allocated for the poor and needy. They should be given to charity societies and orphans."

"I demand that an investigative committee be formed by the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs and the Environment and the House's Freedoms Committee to probe the case," Dr. Emoush added.

The government did not reply to his comment.

Another protest came from Islamist Deputy Abdul Munem Abu Zant (Amman), who claimed that the president of the Engineers Association, Leith Shbeilat, who is currently on trial

for charges of lese majeste, was receiving "inhuman treatment" in detention.

He also charged that Mr. Shbeilat was denied his right to meet with his lawyer in private and claimed that the treatment that Mr. Shbeilat receives was part of a government policy to quell him as an opposition figure.

"Why Shbeilat is being taken as a prisoner and forced to wear prison clothes while he has not been convicted," Sheikh Abu Zant asked. "At the same time we see the murderer of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is being tried in his everyday clothes in the so-called Israel."

Sheikh Abu Zant claimed that the government was exacting revenge from Mr. Shbeilat for his opposition to the government's policies.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Abdul Rauf Rawabdeh rejected Sheikh Abu Zant's claims and said that discussions of any case brought before the court were prohibited under the law.

"We bear this phrase — paying back — too frequently in recent days. It is unrealistic and untrue. The government is committed to democracy and the rule of law," said Mr. Rawabdeh. "If we were to judge citizens on

what they do and what they say, our reaction would have been totally different."

"When a case is brought before the court it becomes the jurisdiction of the court and there should not be any discussion of the issue (so as not to influence the court's proceedings). But using the (House's) floor to talk about these issues is not acceptable and does not help," he added.

Some lawmakers, from the opposition in particular, continued to air complaints and insisted on a right to tackle Mr. Shbeilat's issue. House Speaker Saad Hayel Strout tried to control the situation but they protested again that Mr. Strout was only giving the floor to the government and Mr. Rawabdeh in particular. Minister of Culture Samir Habashneh protested and said that the deputies were making use of the discussions on the House's draft bylaws to raise other issues.

"There are some in the government who do the talking all the time without permission, Mr. Rawabdeh in particular," IAF Deputy Theib Anis (Zarqa) said.

Mr. Rawabdeh shouted back but the discussion was brought to an end by Speaker Strout.

Peres is faithful to Rabin legacy

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Shimon Peres has honoured pledges to follow the path of his slain predecessor in his first three months in office, pressing on with Palestinian self-rule and striving for peace with Syria.

But unlike former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who maintained there were no "sacred dates," even those set out in black and white on the agreements he had signed, Mr. Peres has taken a different track.

Since taking over following Mr. Rabin's assassination in November, Mr. Peres has followed to the letter the accords signed with the Palestinians for the spread of self-rule on the West Bank, leading to historic elections on Jan. 20 which saw Yasser Arafat elected the first Palestinian president.

The Israeli army withdrew from six West Bank towns with clockwork precision, unlike the months of tortuous negotiations which preceded the September accord and saw one deadline expire after another.

But true progress on the Syrian track has so far eluded the determined prime minister.

"As for the Palestinians Peres has done better than expected," said Tourism Minister Uzi Baram, a member of Mr. Peres' ruling Labour Party.

"Even the Palestinians had the impression at the beginning that Mr. Peres was not a true heavyweight. But I must admit that he can take pride in having obtained better results," Mr. Baram said.

"But I am not able to say what progress he has accomplished on the Syrian track," Mr. Peres pushed for peace has been given a huge helping hand by the lack of any Palestinian attacks since August as well as the pro-peace impetus among Israelis shaken to the core by Mr. Rabin's murder.

It is also unsurprising that Mr. Peres has stuck to the path laid down before he took office, since he was one of the main architects of the 1993 declaration of principles

for autonomy which followed months of secret negotiations with the Palestinians hosted by Oslo.

It was Mr. Peres too who negotiated the spread of self-rule across the West Bank with Mr. Arafat through a long, hot summer.

"I am not surprised that Mr. Peres has continued the same policies, for the Oslo accord was his baby," Environment Minister Yossi Sarid said.

However, Mr. Rabin had kept Mr. Peres virtually in the dark about the progress of the on-off negotiations with Syria, a method which Mr. Peres has found useful.

"As for Syria, Peres has taken on Rabin's method — the government is sidelined and the American negotiators know more about it than the Israeli ministers," Mr. Sarid said.

But the momentum for peace led to a resumption of Israeli-Syrian talks in December after a six-month freeze, and a second round of talks are being held under U.S.

auspices in Wye Plantation, Maryland.

Like his predecessor, Mr. Peres has refused to make the slightest public commitment to an Israeli withdrawal on the Golan Heights, the key issue in the negotiations.

"There is no difference of approach between Rabin and Peres over the Golan," said Interior Minister Haim Ramon.

After publicly declaring that general elections would go ahead as scheduled in October, Mr. Peres is now thinking if there is no progress on the Syrian track of holding early polls in May or June which could freeze the talks for months.

He has also warned that he will only start negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories on the West Bank, Gaza Strip as well as East Jerusalem due to open in May, if Mr. Arafat keeps a promise to amend clauses in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) charter calling for the destruction of Israel.

U.N. criticises renovation of some Cairo mosques

CAIRO (AFP) — Renovations of several ancient Cairo mosques by a Shiite sect are being doused in gold.

At Al Guyushli, dating back to 1085 on the Muqattam plateau east of Cairo, the walls have been cemented over and plastered white, covering later Ottoman floral paintings.

Al Lulu (1015-16), in the ancient cemetery at Muqattam's base, has been completely redesigned, with new windows added and the walls blindingly whitewashed.

The head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) Abdul Halim Nureddin, said only that his office had "corrected whatever could be criticised."

The SCA has less than \$10 million budgeted for restoring and maintaining the vast number of Islamic monuments in Cairo and therefore must often rely on foreign funds.

The Bohras themselves, who began restoring Fatimid monuments in Cairo in the 1970s, remain tight-lipped about their activities.

One member recalled how former President Anwar Sadat and the sect's leader, Sultan Mohammad Burhanuddin, participated in a ceremony opening the renovations at Al Hakim in 1980. But he refused any other comment.

Other Bohras at Al Hakim deflected any questions with a polite smile, responding that "officials are away."

Their discretion may aim at avoiding any tension with Egyptians, who are overwhelmingly Sunni and often suspicious of the "mysterious" Shiites.

Shiites "don't pray like we do. They are very rich and they're buying up all the shops in the neighbourhood," Ahmad, a Sunni student, said as he studied in the quiet courtyard of Al Hakim.

The Bohra, with a million followers worldwide, is the smallest of two sects which claim descent from the Fatimides, a clan of Ismaili Shiites who conquered Egypt and built Cairo as their capital in 969 and ruled until 1171.

The other, main sect is the Nizari, led by the Agha Khan, famed for his support of restoration work on Islamic monuments.

Renovations at Al Hakim were completed years ago while the Bohra said they finished the other three in August, although small works continue in all four.

The results are gleaming, sterile mosques which have lost much of their charm.

In Al Aqmar, built on 1125 on the main street of ancient Islamic Cairo, the prayer niche facing Mecca is now blanketed in shiny white marble like the Taj Mahal, while

a calligraphy inscription is being doused in gold.

At Al Guyushli, dating back to 1085 on the Muqattam plateau east of Cairo, the walls have been cemented over and plastered white, covering later Ottoman floral paintings.

Al Lulu (1015-16), in the ancient cemetery at Muqattam's base, has been completely redesigned, with new windows added and the walls blindingly whitewashed.

The head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) Abdul Halim Nureddin, said only that his office had "corrected whatever could be criticised."

The SCA has less than \$10 million budgeted for restoring and maintaining the vast number of Islamic monuments in Cairo and therefore must often rely on foreign funds.

The Bohras themselves, who began restoring Fatimid monuments in Cairo in the 1970s, remain tight-lipped about their activities.

One member recalled how former President Anwar Sadat and the sect's leader, Sultan Mohammad Burhanuddin, participated in a ceremony opening the renovations at Al Hakim in 1980. But he refused any other comment.

Other Bohras at Al Hakim deflected any questions with a polite smile, responding that "officials are away."

Their discretion may aim at avoiding any tension with Egyptians, who are overwhelmingly Sunni and often suspicious of the "mysterious" Shiites.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Floods in Morocco kill 21, cause havoc

RABAT (AFP) — Floods caused by torrential rains in Morocco over the past week have caused the deaths of 21 people and significant damage to crops and infrastructure, various sources said. The dead include five people buried when their houses collapsed at Essauira and Azilal, two crushed by a wall at Mohammadia and three drowned at Settat, all south of Rabat. In Tangiers, on the Mediterranean coast, three people died after being struck by lightning and one was drowned. Other deaths occurred at Chefchaouen in the north, Chichaoua and Taroudant in the south, Khemisset and Sidi Kacem in the centre, Casablanca and Safi, mainly by being swept away when normally dry watercourses filled up. Hundreds of people have been evacuated from flooded districts where tens of thousands of hectares of farmland are inundated, especially in the Gharb region north of Rabat. The rains, which have also damaged roads and cut telephones and power lines, have still been welcomed by Moroccans after three years of severe drought.

Morocco seizes 5 tonnes of cannabis resin

RABAT (R) — Moroccan police in the port of Casablanca seized five tonnes of cannabis resin worth \$5.9 million hidden in a container of canned sardines bound for Poland, Moroccan media reports said on Sunday. The Moroccan news agency MAP said the drug was carefully packed and hidden behind piles of sardine cans on a ship which was to transit Spain. Le Marin du Sahara newspaper said the shipment was made by a Casablanca-based export company. It said the investigation continued. The newspaper valued the cannabis at 50 million Moroccan dirhams (\$5.9 million) and said its street value on the European market was five times that amount.

Israeli children stuck on 'pornographic' gum

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A shopkeeper puzzled by the sudden crowds of schoolchildren besieging his kiosk discovered he was unwittingly selling packets of chewing gum containing pictures of naked women. The kiosk owner in Kiryat Gat in southern Israel began to ask questions after a "spectacular rise" in sales of a certain brand of gum, the local newspaper Kol Hadorom reported. He was told that a child had discovered a picture of a nude woman in his two-cent packet in place of the normal cartoon character and the news had spread like wildfire in the playground. "The assault then began on my kiosk and a huge amount of chewing gum sold in a short time. I had to order more and more from my wholesaler in Tel Aviv before I realised what was going on," the shopkeeper said, asking not to be named. He alerted the children's parents and local rabbi and destroyed all his stocks of the "pornographic" gum. But the children had already collected hundreds of pictures and are selling them or swapping them in the playground to stick on the front of their school books," the newspaper said. "It's our favourite way to spend break-times," an eight-year-old schoolboy proudly told the paper.

Sudan teachers protest non-payment of salaries

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Primary school teachers from the north of Khartoum demonstrated outside the Sudanese employment ministry to protest at non-payment of salaries, the independent daily Akhbar Al Yaum reported Sunday. It quoted one teacher at the rally Saturday saying their local authority had not paid salaries for December or January, nor bonuses which should have been paid in July last year. An under-secretary at the ministry promised to try to resolve the problem by Wednesday by getting in contact with the authority, the paper added.

Kuwaiti police hold man over killing of maid

KUWAIT (R) — Police have arrested a Kuwaiti youth in connection with the fatal stabbing of a Sri Lankan housemaid, the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry said on Sunday. Nader Abdullah Nader, aged 18, was brought in for questioning after the unnamed woman's body was found with three stab wounds on Jan. 11 in Kuwait's Sabahiya district. Nader is the son of the woman who employed the maid, a ministry statement said. About 65,000 Sri Lankans, most of them women between 20 and 30 years old, are among the 200,000 Asians who work as domestic helpers in the oil-rich Gulf country of 1.8 million people. An Arab woman of undetermined nationality was jailed for 10 years last year for beating to death a 25-year-old Sri Lankan maid. Also last year an Arab expatriate was arrested on suspicion of causing the death of another Sri Lankan domestic helper in her early 20s found dead in her bed in suspicious circumstances. Kuwait is one of several Gulf states where Asian maids often accuse employers of abuse. Kuwaitis say maltreatment is committed only by a small minority of employers.

Archaeologists to raise sunken historic ship

CAIRO (AFP) — Archaeologists will soon begin raising a 17th-century ship discovered off the Egyptian Red Sea coast, the head of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, Abdul Halim Nureddin, announced Sunday. A team of Egyptian experts will begin removing a cache of pottery, porcelain and copper pieces from the hull of the ship "then begin raising parts of the ship itself," Mr. Nureddin said, without specifying when the work would begin. In a first phase, experts have already surveyed the site after discovering the historic boat last year underwater near Saadana island off the Red Sea coast, Mr. Nureddin said. So far the nationality of the ship and its destination when it sank have not been identified, Abdullah Attar, a council spokesman, said. Excavations will be conducted by the Institute of Underwater Archaeology in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, where the relics will eventually be stored.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel: 77311-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:00 Bonkers (cartoon)
14:30 Rich Rich
15:00 Playabout
15:15 Bunin Loose
15:40 Doc. — Animals of the Mediterranean
16:00 Voyagers
17:00 Ordy
17:30 Serie — Les Compagnons de L'Adventure
17:50 Magazine — C'Est Pas Sorcier
18:20 Family Programme — L'Ecole de Funs
19:00 News in French
19:15 Magazine — Science
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 McHal's Navy
20:00 Invention
20:25 Hawaii Five — O
21:10 Doc. — The Missing Years
22:00 News in English
22:25 Doc. — A Journey Across the Land of Islam
22:40 Drama — Taurus Soundscapes
23:10 Drama — Taurus Rising
23:59 Comedy — Ellen

PRAYER TIMES

05:07 Fair
06:27 (Sunrise) Daba

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Swedish Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
623785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation Tel.
623740
De La Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terresacres Church Tel. 622366
Church of the Annunciation Tel.
623541
Anglican Church Tel. 628286
Anglican Catholic Church Tel.
711331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel.
75261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 71751
Armenian International Church Tel.
623236
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel.
624328
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 845457
The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675941
The Evangelical Local Church in
Amman Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulklin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Temperatures are expected to drop, skies partly cloudy, with scattered showers expected in the northern and central parts of the Kingdom. In Aqaba, skies will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.
Amman 5/12
Aqaba 11/20
Dorsets 4/14
Jordan Valley 10/18

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 15, Aqaba 23, Humidity readings: Amman 63 per cent, Aqaba 21 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Hisham Kan'an 700286
Dr. Afif Shukri 898463
Dr. Salim Dubouhi 776751
Dr. Osama Hussein 847289
Perdows pharmacy 770336
Al Asma pharmacy 637055
Nairokh pharmacy 623672

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843452
Traffic Police 890390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaint 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 81381/332
Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn 64281/6
Al-Khail Maternity, J. Amn 64241/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 630703
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 848454
Al-Mustashir Hospital 6622709
The Islamic, Abdali 66012757
Al-Ahli, Abdali 6641646
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh 77511026
Army, Marika 89161/115
Queen Aila Hospital 646103
Amal Hospital 637155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)
07:20 Sanaa (RJ)
08:30 Jeddah (RJ)
09:00 New Delhi (RJ)
09:55 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

10:05 Beirut (RJ)
12:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
16:20 Cairo (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:00 Casablanca, Tunis (RJ)
19:00 Bangkok (RJ)
01:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

04:00 Rome (AZ)
09:50 Cairo (MS)
12:00 Muscat, Abu Dhabi (GF)
15:00 Vienna (OS)
15:30 Kiev (UJ)
19:00 Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:45 Athens, Beirut (OA)
23:05 London (BA)
01:20 Amsterdam (KL)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

05:00 Rome (AZ)
06:00 Istanbul (TK)
06:50 Beirut, London (BA)
07:45 Beirut (ME)
10:40 Cairo (MS)
13:30 Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Muscat (GF)
15:50 Vienna (OS)
16:30 Kiev (UJ)
06:30 London (BA)
02:30 Amsterdam (KL)
03:00 Beirut, Athens (OA)

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.
Apples 700/500
Banana 630/630
Banana (Mukammal) 560/560
Banana (imported) 620/650
Cabbage 70/50
Carrot 200/120
Cauliflower 340/220
Cucumbers (large) 200/150
Cucumbers (small) 400/300
Eggplant 200/120
Garlic 1000/800
Grape Fruit 200/150
Lemon 340/220
Marrow (large) 120/80
Marrow (small) 210/120
Onion (green) 180/100
Onion (dry) 220/150
Orange 600/450
Pepper (hot) 480/400
Pepper (sweet) 500/40



SHARING AT IFTAR: Her Majesty Queen Noor Sunday greets guests at an iftar she hosted at Al Hussein Sports City. Invited to break the Ramadan fast with the Queen were the Noor Al Hussein Foundation's board, staff, members of the steering committees of the Royal Endowment for Culture and Education, the National Music Conservatory and the Institute for Child Health and Development as well as members of the Jubilee School's technical committee (Photo by Crystal)

Mother gives birth to quadruplets

Doctors expect all infants to survive

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

Amman — Yesterday morning a woman gave birth to quadruplets by caesarean section at Khalidi Hospital under the supervision of her gynaecologist, Efteem Azar.

The novelty is not the number, even though cases of quadruplets, according to Dr. Azar, are one in 10,000-15,000, but the fact that in this case the doctors expect all the infants to survive and do well when, usually, the rate of survival is one in four.

Jarir Halazon, the newborns' paediatrician, said that in his career he recalls three or four cases of quadruplets born in Jordan, and that not all the babies lived in each case.

Hazmic Yasayan, 29, the

mother of the quadruplets born on Sunday, gave birth to a son four years ago, but has had difficulty conceiving again and thus was treated with fertility drugs for about one year.

According to Dr. Azar, when Mrs. Yasayan became pregnant and was told she was carrying four children, she seemed to be dismayed, but as time passed she accepted the fact "happily."

Classifying theirs as a middle-income family, Mrs. Yasayan, whose husband is a goldsmith, said her first thought was that of "gratefulness to God and then to Dr. Azar."

She also acknowledged apprehension about having to raise the children, but, for the moment, she would take a one-year leave from the Ministry of Health where she is employed and



Gynaecologist Efteem Azar (left) and paediatrician Jarir Halazon hold two of the quadruplets born to Hazmic Yasayan on Sunday at Khalidi Hospital. All four infants are reported in stable condition and expected to do well (Petra photo)

depend on the help of her mother.

The babies, whose weights range between 1,170 and 1,450 grammes, are in stable condition in incubators.

Of the three boys and a girl, the girl is the tiniest, but the paediatrician is almost sure all are going to be fine.

Chairman of House public freedoms panel, Arab Human Rights Organisation reply to minister of interior's statement

AMMAN — The chairman of the public freedoms committee at the Lower House of Parliament, Theeb Abdullah, Sunday responded to statements made by Interior Minister Salameh Hamad as published in Al Ra'i daily on Jan 23 concerning government views on public freedoms.

Following is a nine-point statement circulated to the press by Deputy Abdullah.

1—According to the minister of interior, the General Intelligence Department (GID) has not detained any citizen except on the orders of the Prosecutor General of the State Security Court. But I know of numerous cases in which the security services arrested citizens without order and that they were detained for a long time before a court trial.

2—The Minister of Interior maintains that the intelligence department does not interfere in the appointment of government officials, but I know of a number of citizens who were dismissed from their jobs for security reasons under orders from the intelligence department and some were not reinstated in their former jobs upon the request of the GID.

3—The minister maintains that the GID does not require that passports not be issued to certain citizens nor does it confiscate these people's passports. But I know of cases in which the passports were withdrawn and are still in the possession of the GID.

4—According to the Minister of Interior, (former deputy) Laith Shbeilat was apprehended in accordance with laws and regulations and that he is accorded a fair trial. But while voicing my pride in

the Jordanian judiciary, I know that Shbeilat was arrested without a prosecutor general's warrant. In addition, the prison authority has rejected a court order allowing Shbeilat's lawyers to meet with him in private. The lawyers have repeatedly complained about this behaviour and about placing Shbeilat in a cell that lacks hygiene and proper sanitation at a time when Shbeilat is known to be suffering from rheumatism. In addition, he was denied a heavy coat to protect him from the cold.

5—According to Mr. Hamad, the students of Muta University have all regained their rights following their acquittal from court. But I have received complaints from the relatives of these students that their rights are still being ignored.

6—The Minister of Interior has criticised the contents of a report by the Arab Human Rights Organisation (AHRO) and its chairman Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, saying that the organisation is not licensed as a political party. But the truth is that the organisation was formed by the political parties. Mr. Ahn Gharbieh, who had to face trial for being head of an allegedly unlicensed organisation, has been acquitted of the charges.

7—While I do agree with the Minister of Interior about his general views regarding the freedom of the press, lately the government has been tightening the noose around the press. A chief editor of one of the weeklies has been brought to trial charged with publishing an article by an Arab citizen expressing hope that his country will follow Jordan's political example. Instead of receiving praise for this stand, the editor of

the weekly has been detained with criminals.

8—According to the minister, Mahmoud Awamleh was killed when the police were trying to arrest him, blaming the dead man for his own fault of failing to report to the police station as was requested. I say that the security forces could have arrested the late Mr. Awamleh without endangering his own life.

9—According to the minister, "the concerned authorities do not arrest people for their beliefs and their political ideologies. But I know of cases where the police stormed homes and arrested suspects on charges of being affiliated to political parties.

Mr. Abdullah's statements coincided Sunday with a press conference given by Labib Kamhawi, vice-president of AHRO, who commented on Mr. Hamad's remarks about the organisation's annual report.

Dr. Kamhawi said the organisation reaffirms the contents of its report about human rights violations in Jordan.

"What occurred as published in the report was 100 per cent correct," said Dr. Kamhawi, who added that the Minister of Interior's statements "were full of falsehoods and contrary to the truth in every respect."

"The organisation would like to reaffirm that its annual report about human rights violations does not even cover the whole truth," said Dr. Kamhawi, adding that it was a draft report, and that the final report will contain complete information about such violations in 1995.

"The Minister of Interior failed to check with the organisation about information it gathered about human rights violations,

and he failed to provide us with a copy of his replies which appeared in the local press," added Dr. Kamhawi.

"It is clear that the minister's conduct is aimed at casting doubt on AHRO's credibility by distorting facts and by presenting the organisation as lacking accuracy and objectivity. But the organisation possesses a great deal of evidence that confirm the violations," Dr. Kamhawi said.

Charging that the Interior Ministry's behaviour was a flagrant encroachment on one of the society's civic organisations, Dr. Kamhawi said, "If the minister is following this method with the AHRO, we wonder how he deals with citizens?"

"AHRO is a non-governmental organisation registered in Jordan according to the country's laws, and it is the only one of its kind operating in this field and has been openly dealing with all parties freely and therefore it hopes that the government will follow suit," said Dr. Kamhawi.

He said the organisation is not an enemy of the government and does not wish to be considered as such.

But he added: "The organisation had, in 1995, tried to meet with the Prime Minister and other officials in the hope of trying to find proper channels of coordination in dealing with human rights violations, but regrettably our request was turned down and this is a clear indication of the government's way of dealing with human rights issues."

Stressing that the organisation is neutral and does not adopt a political stand, Dr. Kamhawi said the organisation conducts its activities objectively and fairly, adding that "the organisation views this martial-style behaviour with seriousness."

State hospitals buy cancer drugs from private sector

AMMAN (J.T.) — A usual end-of-the-year shortage at government hospitals of certain cancer treatment drugs has led the Ministry of Health to allow these hospitals to purchase the medicines at local drug stores.

Health Minister Aref Bataineh Sunday instructed government hospitals to secure the necessary drugs for the treatment of cancer patients, according to a report by Petra news agency.

Dr. Bataineh told the Jordan Times that cancer patients who can afford it pay only 10 per cent of their treatment costs. The Ministry pays the balance, he said.

Needy patients are fully exempt from paying any treatment expenses, he added. The shortage of medicines is not uncommon, said Samir Kayed, head of the ministry's Radiology Department. He told the Jordan Times that end-of-year inventories were taken and new supplies of drugs were ordered, but that not all the requested supplies have been delivered yet.

Veterinary association members not involved in arson case, culprits arrested — JVA head

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Arsonists, not members of the Jordan Veterinary Association (JVA), were responsible for setting the JVA office ablaze last week. JVA President Ahmad Ajlouni told reporters Sunday.

The JVA office, located near the Second Circle in Jabal Amman, was set on fire on Jan. 21, two days after an association committee decision to freeze 170 memberships for failure to pay the union more than JD 130,000 in membership dues.

Although initially JVA members were suspected of involvement in the incident, Dr. Ajlouni stressed that "there is no connection between the association's decision and the fire incident."

According to Dr. Ajlouni, police arrested

three teenagers and accused them of burglarising the JVA office and then setting it ablaze to conceal their fingerprints.

Dr. Ajlouni told reporters during a press conference at the Professional Associations Complex that the association is operating out of temporary premises at the Jordan Nursing Association "until the remodelling of the association's office is finished within the next two months."

He said most of the association's important documents were found intact.

He said, however, that it will take the union, which was established in 1972, two years to recover data lost because of the destruction to computers and disks.

Dr. Ajlouni said the association will file a law suit against the three suspects and that it has

appointed a lawyer to seek compensation for damages which are estimated at more than JD 50,000.

According to Dr. Ajlouni, the suspects broke into the building, opened the JVA safe, found it empty, then stole electrical equipment. The suspects then poured kerosene throughout the office and set it on fire.

The three youths were apprehended the same evening of the incident while attempting to sell the stolen equipment.

The youths, according to police officials, confessed and reenacted their crime.

"This incident taught us a good lesson — never to keep our data and documentation in the same place," Mr. Ajlouni said.

Blaze severely damages 2 commercial buildings near Sahab

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A huge fire on Saturday engulfed a carpentry and a warehouse on the Ring Road near the Sahab area causing extensive damage to both buildings but no injuries, officials said Sunday.

Captain Farid Share', director of the Public Relations Department at the Civil Defence Department (CDD), told the Jordan Times Sunday that the fire

was an accident caused by negligence and started in one of the rooms in the carpentry building.

According to Capt. Share', one of the employees was cutting metal with a torch in a room filled with containers of paint and turpentine. Sparks from the blow torch came in contact with the flammable liquids and ignited the fire, he said.

The fire spread quickly in the 1,000-square-metre building and destroyed its contents, Capt. Share' said,

adding that the blaze also spread to a neighbouring warehouse.

According to Capt. Share', the fire destroyed 1,200 tonnes of soybeans that were stored in the warehouse. The blaze caused extensive damage to the building, he said.

Firefighters worked for three hours to extinguish the blaze and prevent it from spreading to neighbouring buildings, the CDD official said.

Meanwhile, in Zarqa a

two-year-old child Saturday drowned in a water bucket in his house in Jabal Ahad, according to Public Security Department (PSD) officials.

Omar Abdullah was playing in the backyard of his house when "he accidentally fell in a water bucket."

"The child, who was discovered by his parents an hour after he disappeared, was playing alone when the incident occurred," the police official said.



RAMADAN TRADITIONS: A beverage vendor pours sous, a favourite Ramadan drink, for a crowd of clients in downtown Amman (AFP photo)

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILM

* "Le Peril Jeune" at the French Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

PLAYS

* "Between Two Jaws," at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

* "Ramadan Supermarket" (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Photography and paintings of railways and trains at Goethe-Institut (until Jan. 31).

* Paintmaking and paintings by Jordanian artist Yasser Dweik at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Luweibdeh. Also displaying paintings and sculptures by contemporary artists (until Feb. 18).

* Contemporary and Traditional Jewellery at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, Shmeisani (Tel. 699141) (until Jan. 31).

* Plastic (abstract) art exhibition by Jordanian and Iraqi artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Umm Utheina (until Feb. 6).

* Paintings by artist Raphael Chabrol at the French Cultural Centre (until Jan. 31).

Pakistan rules out war with India after rocket attacks

ISLAMABAD (Agencies) — Pakistan vowed Sunday to respond to a rocket attack that killed 20 people in a border village in Pakistani-held Kashmir, but ruled out war with India.

"Pakistan will give a response," President Farooq Leghari told reporters when asked to comment on Friday's bloodshed at the village of Forward Kahuta, about six kilometres from the ceasefire line that splits the mountainous Himalayan region.

He did not spell out what Islamabad would do in the face of what he called a "wrong and dangerous escalation", but said: "I think there is no threat of war between Pakistan and India."

Pakistan has accused Indian troops of firing two rockets at a mosque as worshippers were leaving after Friday prayers, killing at least 20 people and wounding 25.

India has denied that its forces fired the rockets.

In Jammu, the winter capital of Indian-held Kashmir, a state government spokesman said seven people had been wounded, two seriously, in "unprovoked" firing by Pakistani troops on Indian positions in the Jammu and Kashmir region Saturday night.

He said civilians in six Indian border villages in the Akhnoor region, 32 kilometres west of Jammu, had been hit.

A Pakistani military spokesman said there had been no firing across the line by Pakistani troops Saturday or Sunday.

Major-General Alfonso Pessolano, head of the U.N. military observer group in India and Pakistan

(UNMOGIP), visited Forward Kahuta Sunday as his men investigated the rocket attack, one of the bloodiest incidents on the ceasefire line for months.

He said he had seen craters made by two rockets there and could confirm that there had been an unspecified number of dead and wounded. "I can't give you any other information about the origin of firing," he told Reuters by telephone.

Gen. Pessolano said two rockets had landed on the Indian-held side of the ceasefire line near the town of Poonch in the same sector Friday. He could not say who had fired them.

He said rocket fire was a "normal activity" for both sides along the line of control, as the ceasefire line is known.

Pakistan's Defence Minister Aftab Shaaban Meeraan told reporters that the rocket attack and India's test of its medium-range Prithvi-2 missile Saturday were part of preparations for India's next elections, rather than for war.

Najmuddin Sheikh, secretary at the Foreign Ministry, described the Prithvi as a "Pakistan-specific" missile that could target every major Pakistani city. He said it augured a qualitative change in the South Asian security equation.

Diplomats said India and Pakistan were unlikely to let their rivalry erupt into full-scale conflict. "Escalating tension is not in the interest of either side," said an Indian diplomat.

Asked how Pakistan might react to the rocket attack on Forward Kahuta, a Western diplomat said: "My instinct is that it will be played up for the media, but

judging by past experience, I don't expect a big military response."

However, a leader of the separatist Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), one of the Kashmiri groups fighting Indian rule, urged Pakistan to strike back forcefully.

"Pakistan should take a very strong stand and respond duly — obviously not against civilians, but the Indian forces should be taught a lesson," Amanullah Khan told Reuters.

Mr. Leghari said the rocket attack reflected what he called the frustration of the Indian government in failing to suppress an "indigenous freedom movement" in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Muslim Kashmiri rebels have waged a guerrilla war against Indian rule since 1990 in the two-thirds of Kashmir that Delhi controls. Pakistan holds the remaining one-third.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the guerrillas and giving them sanctuary. Islamabad denies the charge and says it gives the rebels only moral and diplomatic support.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars since independence from Britain in 1947 over Kashmir.

Kashmiri Muslim leaders Sunday urged the United Nations to intervene between India and Pakistan over their lingering Kashmir row.

"It is high time for U.N. to intervene," said Kashmir's Muslim head priest Umar Farooq, who is also chairman of the Freedom Conference, which supports the bloody militant campaign for the state's seces-

sion from India. He warned that the heavy exchange of gunfire between Indian and Pakistani troops since Friday could trigger a major crisis.

"The small skirmishes can any time lead to a full-scale battle," Mr. Farooq said. "And this time it will be nuclear war... The U.N. has a role and it should play that now."

"It will be too late if U.N. and other world bodies do not make the two countries sit together at the earliest," he added.

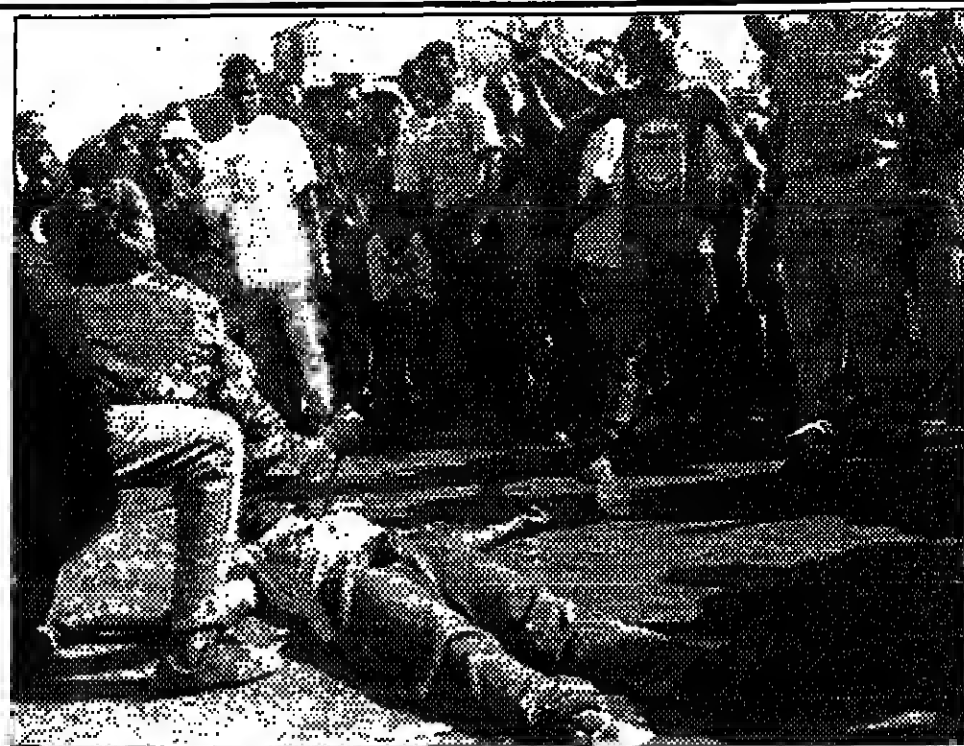
The Coordinational Committee of Kashmiri Militants Sunday called for a general strike all over the strife-hit Indian state to protest "the Indian army attack on" the mosque.

"So far the Indian troops were killing people in this side of Kashmir only, but now they are targeting Kashmiris on other side also," said Mr. Farooq. He urged the U.N. to prevent similar cross-border attacks.

Shahid Shah, the most influential Kashmiri Muslim leader, also expressed grief over the mosque attack and pleaded for an immediate end to the continuing dispute over the Himalayan state's ownership.

"I am sure war can break out any time," said Javed Ahmed, a student in Srinagar. Added another resident, Zahid Abdullah: "This dispute should end once and for all, and war can provide the best solution."

India and Pakistan have refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and are believed to possess nuclear weapons.



A presumed thief is stabbed to death at the hands of an angry mob at the slums of La Saline, following the killing of a well-liked grass-roots community leader (Reuters photo)

6 killed in Haitian slum riot

PORT-AU-PRINCE (R) — six people were killed and hundreds were left homeless Saturday after a riot erupted in one of the Haitian capital's largest slums to protest against the killing of a popular community leader, officials said.

Guy Jean-Pierre, 27, who headed a neighbourhood watch committee in the crowded La Saline slum near the capital's port, was killed by thieves early Saturday, United Nations spokesman Eric Falt said.

Residents loyal to Mr. Jean-Pierre for his efforts to reduce crime in their impoverished community retaliated by fatally stabbing and beating at least three men who they believed were responsible for Mr. Jean-Pierre's death, witnesses said.

"Six dead bodies were found at three different locations of La Saline and the sea-port," said Mr. Falt. He said the exact circumstances of the violence remained unclear, but "it all started when Jean-Pierre was found dead."

According to witnesses, the enraged crowd set the bodies on fire, as well as the

alleged thieves' homes, and proceeded to burn down several nearby food silos in an effort to keep other thieves away.

The fire spread rapidly throughout the shantytown, leaving hundreds of the capital's poorest residents homeless and stripping them of their few possessions.

Radio reports said an elderly woman was killed in the blaze, but Mr. Falt could not confirm the report.

He said Haitian National Police were forced to fire their guns into the air to bring the situation under control. U.N. peacekeepers were also on hand to restore order.

President-Elect Rene Preval is scheduled to assume power from Mr. Aristide on Feb. 7, the 10-year anniversary of the fall of the Duvalier family dictatorship.

Mr. Preval will be hard-pressed to respond to the slow pace of economic growth and crime that continues to plague the country 15 months after multinational troops intervened to restore Mr. Aristide to power, analysts say.

6 new detentions reported in Burma

RANGOON (Agencies) — Burmese authorities detained six opposition supporters in the capital two days ago, apparently in connection with their political activities, informed sources said Sunday.

A National League for Democracy (NLD) staff member confirmed that six NLD members had been taken in but said he had no details of their identities or of any charges against them.

"We are not sure why they are being detained," he said. The informed sources said the six were believed to have been involved in a commemoration of the death of a political prisoner five years ago.

The detentions were the latest in what political observers have described as a pattern of low-level harassment against the opposition.

The NLD staffer said meanwhile that authorities had released two more people arrested earlier this month in Mandalay following a traditional theatre performance at the Rangoon home of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

This left only the troupe's two comedians in custody, he said.

The comedians were believed to have antago-

nised the military authorities with their off-the-cuff, satirical remarks during the performance.

Meanwhile Ms. Suu Kyi denied government accusations that she has become dictatorial in her running of the party.

"There is no practice of dictatorship in the NLD party," the Nobel Peace laureate told supporters late Saturday.

Ms. Suu Kyi's remark was made after official, state-run Burmese-language newspapers carried a commentary asking her to step down because she had become dictatorial.

In the commentary entitled Give Up Little Sister, Ms. Suu Kyi was accused of ignoring the will of the people in her leadership of the pro-democracy party.

The commentary, the latest in a series of criticisms against the democracy leader, said 50-year old Ms. Suu Kyi used "feminine wiles" over other party members to get her way.

"I would like to request you give up little sister, in order to raise the political impression of the party," said the commentary.

It suggested the NLD try to find a way to change its decision to withdraw from military-sponsored constitutional talks.

Ms. Suu Kyi said late last year the NLD, which she helped found, was pulling out of the talks because they did not represent the will of the people.

About 590 delegates, mostly hand-picked by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), are involved in the Constitutional Convention which has been meeting intermittently since 1993 to draft guidelines of a new constitution.

The NLD won more than 80 per cent of the seats in a 1990 election but the SLORC ignored the result and launched a crackdown against all opposition to its rule.

Ms. Suu Kyi has been calling for dialogue with the SLORC leaders since she was released from six years of house arrest last July.

But SLORC officials have not responded and instead have issued vague threats, warning her not to try to disrupt the country.

Late last year another commentary in the state media suggested Ms. Suu Kyi was a traitor and said she and her colleagues would be annihilated if they tried to destabilise the country.

Welcome To The Dollhouse takes prize at Sundance

PARK CITY, Utah (R) — Welcome To The Dollhouse, a dark comedy about a girl's first year in junior high, grabbed the Grand Jury Prize at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival late Saturday, insuring its position as one of the top independent films for the year ahead. The second of the festival's two highest awards, the Grand Jury Prize for a Documentary, went to Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern, which follows the plight of an Iowa farmer unaccustomed to the big business of American agriculture. Troublesome Creek also took home the Audience Award, which is voted on by the festival goers, for documentary, Care Of The Spitfire Grill won the Audience Prize for Dramatic Feature Film. Taking a top prize at Sundance, the premiere festival in the United States for so-called "art house" movies, means a film will likely hit movie screens with an immediate buzz in the movie industry and among the media. That combination often translates into big audiences and box office success.

"What's so wonderful is that this new movie has so much greater chance of being seen by more people," Todd Solondz, director and screenwriter of Dollhouse, told Reuters following his acceptance of the award. The 36-year-old Solondz, whose thick glasses, thinning hair and slight frame are reminiscent of Woody Allen, was visibly shaken at winning the award and modest afterward. "My first reaction was that I was deeply surprised. I hadn't prepared anything speechwise, and the end result was that I didn't thank my mother and father," he said. He also forgot to thank Sony Classics Pictures, which picked up the movie and will begin showing it around Memorial Day.

Thief slips up asking for directions

SHANGHAI (R) — A man who robbed a house in Shanghai made a big mistake the next day when he asked a lady at a bus stop for directions — she recognised the clothes he was wearing as belonging to her husband.

Sunday's Shanghai Liberation Daily said the lady grabbed the thief with the help of bystanders and banded him over to police.

Sri Lankan women ignore women-only bus service

COLOMBO (R) — Sri Lanka plans to scrap a special bus service introduced for women commuters as it is not being widely used, Transport Minister Srimani Athulathudali was quoted as saying by the Sunday Times. The service was launched last year on five routes in the capital Colombo after women's groups complained of sexual harassment while travelling on public buses.

China gets active over cost of passive smoking

BEIJING (R) — China's world-leading army of 350 million smokers is posing a serious health risk to an even bigger army that they have created — 460 million passive smokers. A survey quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency said China's top three killers were smoking-related illnesses: Cancer, heart disease and brain disease. The survey, which quizzed 340,000 non-smokers and found that 39.75 per cent were affected by sidestream smoke, concluded that China had 460 million passive smokers and that smoking affected 810 million people — or two-thirds of the population.

U.K. premier defends elected N. Ireland body as 'passport to talks'

LONDON (Agencies) — British Prime Minister John Major defended Sunday his controversial plan to call elections in Northern Ireland, saying the resulting body was only intended to get negotiations going on the future of the province.

"It will not have administrative powers, it will not have legislative powers," he said in an interview with the Sunday Telegraph.

"It will be elected for the purpose of providing an electoral mandate to get people sitting around the table. In short it is a passport to talks."

The members of the body would nominate people "whose sole responsibility would be to enter into the talks and negotiations," Mr. Major said.

"Once they have an electoral mandate to sit down and talk, there would be no justification for not sitting down to talk to reach an agreement, and that's the only purpose of the body I am proposing."

The British government's plan for elections, announced last week, was bitterly attacked by nationalists, including Sinn Fein, political wing of the paramilitary IRA, and by the Irish government.

They accused the government of ignoring the conclusions of a three-member international commission on the best way of getting round a deadlock over the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons as a condition of negotiations.

London was also alleged to be pandering to the majority Protestant loyalists in Northern Ireland, whose support Mr. Major's government needs to bolster its slender majority in the House of Commons.

Mr. Major said he was thinking of a body of between 30 and 90 members, elected by proportion-

al representation.

He claimed that once it was elected, "Sinn Fein would see the talks progressing and the loyalist and others and constitutional parties would see the progressive dismantling of the paramilitary weapons and explosives."

Asked if he would be prepared to shake the band of Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, Mr. Major said, "when Gerry Adams has begun to decommission and when Gerry Adams is in the talks, then a different set of circumstances applies but that hasn't applied yet."

"When he shows me that he genuinely believes in democracy, and is starting to shed arms, then I can treat him in the same way that I treat other democratic leaders."

In Glasgow Saturday, Northern Ireland Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew said the idea of elections was "a door opening rather than closing."

Speaking at a gathering of Scottish Conservatives, Sir Patrick said, "we have not worked all these years for talks leading to a settlement to want to invent ways of delaying it now."

Mr. Major, whose Conservative Party is trailing badly in opinion polls, said Sunday he is confident of winning the next general election.

In an interview with the Sunday Telegraph newspaper Mr. Major, who must call an election in just over a year, unveiled a strategy which he hopes will secure victory.

He plans to re-establish the traditional contact of the Conservative Party with its supporters, to return the "feel-good" factor as the economy improves and to campaign against the opposition Labour Party to highlight "the clear distinction between what they say and what they do."

"I like elections, and clearly we are within 15 months of an election, so I am beginning to sniff the wind and feel much happier about it," he said.

Mr. Major also promised

to vigorously defend the constitution against Labour's plans for reforms, including devolution.

Ministers agreed to the Conservatives' election strategy at a special meeting last week. They launched a spirited attack against Labour accusing them of being hypocrites after their health spokeswoman Harriet Harman decided to send her son to an elitist grammar school.

"That degree of hypocrisy on education, you can see it in a range of other policies, as well, where they will say one thing and do quite another," Mr. Major said.

The Harman incident gave the Conservatives a much needed boost after Emma Nicholson shocked the party late last year when she defected to the Liberal Democrats.

The Conservative Party, which has a paper-thin majority in parliament and is divided over its policy towards the European Union, trails the main opposition Labour Party in opinion polls by 25 points.

Mr. Major said people would reap the benefits of the economic recovery and that he was determined to correct the perception that the Conservatives had not delivered their tax-cutting mandate.

"I think the feel-good factor, the confidence and growth in the British economy and prospects is coming back. Self-evidently it is coming back in reality, we must make sure it comes back in perception," he added.

The prime minister said he thought the 1999 timetable for a single European currency was "flawed for certain unless the economics are right" and added he hoped to reduce the public spending ratio even further.

"I think we can get below 40 per cent and then further, certainly. I would certainly like to get down to 35 per cent, but I am not predicting that."

U.S. firefighters unable to cap raging gas well fire

MORGAN CITY, La. (R)

— Firefighters were unable Saturday to cap a raging fire burning for the past four days on an offshore natural gas platform in the Gulf of Mexico, emergency workers said.

The fire, which is shooting flames at least 25 metres into the sky, now is expected to burn into next week while firefighters try to cap the well to shut off the gas flow and extinguish the blaze, said Pat Campbell, a firefighter with Wild Well Control Co. of Houston.

"It's going to take several days for us to remove some debris and install some new equipment so we can cap this thing," said Mr. Campbell, whose crew was unable to smother the flames Saturday with a heavy drilling mud compound injected into the well.

Firefighters for the second straight day faced eight-foot (2.5 metre) swells and strong winds as they pumped sea water from a pair of fireboats onto the damaged platform, which is sitting about 128 kilometres off the Louisiana coast.

In addition to battling the rough seas, firefighters are coping with heat and a deafening roar as the blow-out burns several million cubic feet of natural gas a day from a well bored into the sea floor.

Well operator Oryx Energy of Dallas evacuated 45 workers safely Wednesday after the fire broke out while pipes were being attached to one of several wells feeding into the platform.

The Coast Guard said there were no signs of spills from the platform, located in more than 300 feet (91 metres) of water in the Eugene Island area of the gulf, home to hundreds of oil and natural gas wells.

Japan to step up bid to transfer U.S. drills from Okinawa

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan is to accelerate the transfer of U.S. military drills from Okinawa to the mainland in a bid to ease anger at the U.S. presence in the southern island following last year's rape case, Yomiuri Shimbun said Sunday.

The government will choose new locations for live shooting drills by U.S. forces from nine possible sites outside Okinawa prefecture, the mass-circulation daily said, quoting government sources.

There had previously been five possible sites, and the government hopes to reach a decision on where to relocate the drills later this year, the sources said.

The government is also considering transferring a U.S. shooting

exercise using Howitzers, currently held at an area along prefectural Highway 104 in Okinawa prefecture, to one of the nine sites.

The nine locations include Japanese military bases at the foot of Mount Fuji, Oita, Niigata, Fukushima and Shiga prefectures, the newspaper said.

Anger against the U.S. presence in Okinawa has grown since a 12-year-old girl was abducted and raped by U.S. servicemen in September sparking protests about the disproportionate number of U.S. troops on the island.

Okinawa accounts for less than one per cent of Japan's land area but is home to more than half the 47,000 American troops in the country and also houses 75 per cent of U.S. mili-

tary facilities in Japan.

Meanwhile, news reports said Sunday that the father of the rape victim in Okinawa has turned down part of a proposed compensation payment from the accused.

The three U.S. servicemen have said they would offer a total of 1.5 million Yen (\$14,000) in compensation to the victim's family, and have already paid 900,000 Yen, newspapers said, quoting a lawyer for one of the accused.

But the victim's father was quoted as saying that he would not accept the remaining 600,000 Yen after consulting people around him.

One of the three servicemen has pleaded guilty to raping the girl while the other two have denied rape but pleaded guilty to assaulting the schoolgirl on Sept. 4.



A special unit of "Fighting Police" make their way down Route 10 to secure the area captured by advancing Cambodian government troops Sunday. The Cambodian military has started their dry-season offensive against the Khmer Rouge this week and tens of thousands of troops from across the country are taking part in the campaign (Reuters photo)

Cambodia's top military brass rally troops

BATTAMBANG, Cambodia (AFP) — Several top military officials including co-ministers of defence, Generals Tea Banh and Tea Chamrath, spent Sunday travelling around his northwest provincial capital visiting soldiers at rural outposts, military sources said.

The visits come as Phnom Penh's troops are advancing slowly on two fronts towards the Khmer Rouge stronghold at Pailin, 86 kilometres southwest of here on National Route 10.

In a heavily guarded convoy, the defence ministers along with Royal Cambodian Armed Forces chief of staff, General Ke Kim Yan and deputy chief of staff, Nhiek Bun Chhay travelled to the government's position at Treng about halfway between Battambang and Pailin, the sources said.

Ke Kim Yan, who cancelled a visit to Burma with first Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh because of the situation in the northwest, and the others distributed needles to the troops and offered them encouragement, they said.

The visits come as government soldiers advanced to the closest position they have been to Pailin since they captured the base for a brief period in 1994.

Late Friday, along Route 10, government troops encountered no resistance when they occupied Phnom Flek (Leaf Mountain), 23 kilometres west of Pailin.

Also on Friday, government soldiers captured a guerrilla outpost further northwest on Route 58 at Phum Kbal Krabei (Buffalo Head Village), about 34 kilometres north of Pailin.

Three government soldiers were wounded in the 30-minute firefight, and the bodies of three guerrillas were found in the village along with a large amount of 76.2mm mortar shells and automatic weapons.

On Saturday, Gen. Nhiek Bun Chhay visited commanders of the military's Division Six who captured Phum Kbal Krabei and offered his congratulations.

Labour: Don't love Keating, respect him

CANBERRA (R) — Australia's labour government, campaigning for re-election after 13 years in power, Sunday targeted Prime Minister Paul Keating's tough but unpopular leadership as a key election theme.

As the conservative opposition campaigned on offering a clear alternative to what it labelled a tired and untrustworthy government, Labour told voters they didn't have to like Mr. Keating, but should back his bruising and blunt leadership.

"You don't have to like him, but you've got to respect him," a woman says in a television advertisement, which began airing during high-rating telecasts of the Australian Open tennis finals and the Australia-Sri Lanka cricket test Sunday.

The advertisement is part of Labour's campaign for the March 2 election, with the government fighting to claw back a heavy opinion poll lead held by the conservative opposition alliance of Liberal and National parties, headed by Liberal leader John Howard.

The advertisement paints Mr. Keating, generally perceived by voters as arrogant, as a "tough but fair" leader — "someone who takes charge" and a leader ready to make tough decisions.

Although Labour trails the opposition by at least seven percentage points, Mr. Keating leads Mr. Howard as preferred prime minister by up to four percentage points.

Previewing the ad, Mr. Keating told reporters only his government had the

leadership, imagination and courage to lead the country into the 21st century.

"The rationale, I think, is to make very clear that Australia's got this far with leadership, commitment, passion energy — the very things that John Howard and his coalition don't have," he said.

Mr. Keating's deputy, Finance Minister Kim Beazley, defended the ad, saying in a television interview Mr. Keating's leadership style was "absolutely what the country needed."

"When you're dealing with the region around U.S., which is a very tough region economically, and very tough on this country, you actually need to be a bit visionary, you need to be a bit bruising and blunt. And that's what the prime minister offers."

Pledging to shun personal abuse during the campaign, opposition leader Howard said he was confident, "but not smug," that voters wanted a change after 13 years of Labour government.

"I sense a desire for change after 13 years, of feeling that this government has run out of puff and that we do need a change," Mr. Howard said in a television interview.

"Look, as far as I am concerned, I think Paul Keating has been a failure as a prime minister."

"I think his pretensions to leadership are phoney."

Labour holds power by a thin margin and would lose office with about a 0.5 per cent national swing against it for the 148 seats in parliament's lower house.

Police kill 2 MQM activists in Karachi

KARACHI (R) — Police said they had shot dead two militants of the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) Sunday during a battle in the southern port city of Karachi.

A police officer said police had raided a graveyard in central district's Liaquatabad area after receiving information that "terrorists" were holding a secret meeting there.

"When we reached the place, there were at least 15 of them, who started firing as soon as they saw the

policemen approaching," the officer said.

He said Nazim Mian and Sadiq Ali, both in their mid-20s, were killed, but their comrades escaped.

An MQM spokesperson, denying the police version, said police had killed the pair after detaining them Saturday night.

The MQM says security forces have killed more than 20 of its activists in custody this month, compared to 130 it says were killed in similar circumstances in 1995.

Russia adds Chechen 'Lone Wolf' to wanted list

MOSCOW (R) — Russia has issued an arrest warrant for the leader of the "Lone Wolf" group of Chechen rebels who took 2,000 hostages in the southern Republic of Dagestan this month, Interfax News Agency said Sunday.

The news of the warrant follows Moscow's ill-fated attempt to surround and crush Salmar Raduyev and his fellow hostage-takers as they made their way back to Chechnya with more than 100 of their captives.

Russian officials said 153 rebels died in the four-day bombardment of the Dagestan village of Pervomayskoye near the Chechen border and that most of the hostages escaped.

But Mr. Raduyev and around 100 other rebels broke out of the Russian siege, taking dozens of hostages with them.

They released about 50 but are still holding a group of police commandos and some energy workers captured in a separate hostage seizure in the Chechen capital Grozny.

Interfax quoted informed sources in the judiciary as saying Mr. Raduyev was being sought on four charges, banditry, terrorism, hostage-taking and premeditated murder.

Dole takes tough stance in New Hampshire

CONCORD, N.H. (R) — Republican presidential candidate Sen. Bob Dole fired off salvos at fast-charging rival Steve Forbes, President Bill Clinton and the media Saturday while declaring that his White House bid was going "full blast."

Sen. Dole called on Mr. Forbes to release his income tax returns and said voters in the early presidential test states like New Hampshire were growing tired of the multi-millionaire publisher's negative television advertisements.

"I don't believe, if I know the people of New Hampshire, that they appreciate continued assault, day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute (of) negative advertising bashing anybody," Sen. Dole said in a speech to law-enforcement officials.

Sen. Dole's campaign has been seen as weakening in recent weeks as Mr. Forbes floods the airwaves in New

Hampshire and Iowa with television advertisements — many of which attack Sen. Dole.

Mr. Forbes' ads and his proposal for a "flat tax" have rocketed him into second place, but Sen. Dole maintained his polls showed voters were turning against Mr. Forbes and in favour of him.

"Our campaign is going full blast, we believe we're in a very strong position," Sen. Dole said. "Why? Because we tell the truth."

Niger coup ends three years of democratic rule

NIAMEY (AFP) — Niger faced a new era under military rule Sunday after a bloody coup that toppled President Mahamane Ousmane, its first democratically-elected leader in two decades, who had been in office for less than three years.

Five people were reported to have been killed in the brief violence of Saturday when troops under army Chief of Staff Colonel Ibrahim Barre Maïnassara overcame Mr. Ousmane's Presidential Guard.

Col. Maïnassara was officially proclaimed president of the new National Salvation Committee set up to take over all powers. Its vice president is Colonel Issoufou Mamadou Maiga, and its 10 other members all belong to the military.

"If we have undertaken this action, it is not to satisfy personal ambition. We consider this action as a patriotic duty," Col. Maïnassara said on Radio France International, broadcast in Ahidjan.

He added the coup leaders were not looking for "a subterfuge to establish (themselves)."

Col. Maïnassara declared a state of emergency Saturday and said people should remain calm and "understand the meaning of

our action which is to save Niger from jeopardy."

The 1992 constitution was suspended and the National Assembly dissolved, along with all political parties.

According to the army, Mr. Ousmane was under house arrest in a Niamey villa.

Several other political figures were arrested, including Prime Minister Hama Amadou, a military source said without indicating their whereabouts.

Contrary to earlier reports, National Assembly Speaker Mahamadou Issoufou was not detained.

In Paris, a Foreign Ministry statement announced the suspension of civil and military cooperation with the former French colony.

It said the French government condemned the coup and called for the release of those detained and for "the restoration of constitutional legality."

Congolese Economic Decentralisation Minister Martin M'beri also condemned the coup, saying it could lead to further deaths.

"To think that Niger's coup d'état will take care of the country's political problems is an illusion," he told Radio Congo.

Niamey appeared calm at noon Sunday as residents welcomed military patrols

on the streets of Niamey. "Long live the army," fruit traders shouted.

"We're on your side, but don't stay long," a group of youths told a military patrol.

On Sunday, Lieutenant-Colonel Adourahmane Saidou, a spokesman for the National Salvation Committee said three "members of the military" died of their injuries Sunday, bringing to five the number killed.

Speaking in an interview with a private Niger radio station, he did not specify how many of the dead were coup-leaders and how many were members of the Presidential Guard.

On Saturday, military sources said one person on either side was killed in the fighting, and some 10 were wounded, including Presidential Guard Commander Colonel Mamadou Ousseini who was hit in the arm.

Col. Maïnassara justified the action by citing "major perils" threatening the country due to the "personal ambitions, intolerance, cronyism and corruption" which he said characterised the ousted regime.

He said he failed to understand "the persistence at the summit of the state of an absurd, irrational and personalised crisis at a time when the country is prepar-

ing to undertake salutary economic reforms with the support of its partners in development."

Niger had been ruled by Mr. Ousmane, the country's first democratically elected head of state after 20 years of military rule, since April 1993. It had become independent following the end of French rule in 1960.

A coalition government was formed in February last year after elections won by opponents of Mr. Ousmane, but it led to repeated clashes between president and prime minister.

The most recent came as Mr. Ousmane was reappointed head of his own party. His opponents said the move was illegal, arguing the same person could not be head of state and political leader.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world with most of its foreign revenue coming from the export of uranium, of which it is one of the leading producers.

Telephone communications between Niger and the rest of the world, cut off Saturday, were restored early Sunday, but the airport remained closed.

In Paris, an Air France spokeswoman said the company had suspended weekly flights to Niamey until further notice.

White House dismisses report on Hillary's 'dark side'

WASHINGTON (R) — As the White House attempted to return to normal Saturday after Hillary Rodham Clinton's testimony to a federal grand jury, a news magazine reported on what it called the first lady's "dark side."

"Mrs. Clinton has been known to berate her husband in front of staff in what some aides consider a shocking display of disrespect," U.S. News and World Report said in its latest edition due to hit newsstands Monday.

It said that on one occasion more than a year ago, Mrs. Clinton fumed that President Bill Clinton was still preoccupied with the details of legislation rather than standing above the petty quarrels of Capitol Hill.

"How could you be so damn stupid?" Mrs. Clinton was quoted as telling her husband. The magazine said one witness to the tirade said her comments were "lacerating" and aides were embarrassed.

"She is liable to shout when something goes wrong, and aides are skittish about provoking her," the magazine said.

"Family friends of the Clintons say that when things are going well for her, Mrs. Clinton can be extremely protective of her husband. When he is weary or frustrated, she serves him tea and listens patiently as he blows off steam," it said.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry, while not commenting on specific allegations raised in the article, said: "A lot of this smacks of second- and third-hand accounts of people who probably resented her role at the White House."

"I've been here a year and I can't recall anything but pleasant exchanges with the first lady. Americans have seen how gracious the first lady is during the past several days and they'll know that this is a wildly inaccurate portrait of who she is," Mr. McCurry said.

Clinton ahead of challengers in poll despite wife's dragging image

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton's wife Hillary made history Friday, becoming the first first lady to testify before a grand jury, but the pair had some good news as a poll placed the president ahead of his challengers.

Most Americans think Hillary Clinton is hurting her husband's presidency, according to a Newsweek poll made public Saturday.

More than half, or 56 per cent, felt the first lady was damaging President Clinton's hold on the White House, sharply up from April 1994, when only 34 per cent felt she was a liability.

The poll also revealed a sizeable gender gap. A whopping 65 per cent of the men, but only 49 per cent of the women, felt the first lady was hurting the presidency.

The Newsweek poll showed half the respondents believe she is not telling the truth about her role in the Whitewater affair.

With the election less than 10 months away, Hillary Clinton was forced to face a four-hour questioning Friday by a special investigator and grand jury looking into the Whitewater affair.

Investigators wanted to know how documents they had sought for two years suddenly showed up mysteriously at the White House recently.

The documents pertain to the amount of time Hillary Clinton spent working as a lawyer for a failed Arkansas bank that she and her husband had been involved with in the Whitewater real estate project.

Hillary Clinton is also at the centre of congressional investigations seeking to know what her role was in the firings of White House travel office staff shortly after the Clintons came to Washington in 1993.

That affair has come to be known as "travelgate."

But the poll held some good news for the

president.

Mr. Clinton would defeat his closest Republican challengers if the U.S. election were held today, Newsweek reported.

Mr. Clinton received support from 52 per cent of those surveyed, while Republican Senate majority leader Robert Dole landed 49 per cent.

If Mr. Clinton were to face the emerging number-two Republican challenger, millionaire Steve Forbes, the president would win 49 per cent of the vote against 42 per cent for Mr. Forbes, the poll found.

The poll was conducted on Jan. 25 and 26.

Mr. Clinton's good political fortunes, which took a beating from Sen. Dole in the previous Newsweek poll conducted in November, do not seem to suffer from the poor public image Hillary Clinton has.

Newsweek pegged the president's favourable ratings at 46 per cent and unfavourable ratings at 41 per cent.

Hillary Clinton's predicament would not stop 77 per cent of the Democrats, 55 per cent of the Republicans and 68 per cent of the independents from voting for the president.

Newsweek also confirmed Sen. Dole's lead over the Republican pack of challengers is eroding and Mr. Forbes, a virtual unknown just a few months ago, has gained ground.

The Kansas senator is the preferred candidate of 43 per cent of the Republicans against 51 per cent from last November.

Mr. Forbes has gone up to 17 per cent from five per cent, conservative commentator Patrick Buchanan has gone to eight from seven per cent and Texas Senator Phil Gramm has dropped from eight to seven per cent.

Taiwan plays down tension with China

TAIPEI (Agencies) — President Lee Teng-hui Sunday played down media reports of spiralling tension with China, despite a new low in relations triggered by the Washington's recent granting of a transit visa to Vice-President Li Yuan-zu.

"Press reports here have made it seem as though the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are about to wage a war," television reports quoted Mr. Lee as saying during the inauguration of his central Taiwan headquarters in Fengyuan.

The remarks were Mr. Lee's first response to Wednesday's New York Times article saying Beijing has completed plans to attack the Nationalist island.

"You all must relax. There isn't anything like that at all," he said.

The time the two sides killed each other had long gone. Now it's time for the two sides to undergo private exchanges," Mr. Lee stressed, adding that the media exaggerated reports of the plan to invade Taiwan.

The New York Times Wednesday said Beijing was

told Washington it had finalised plans in attack Taiwan after the island's March 23 presidential polls.

The local house fell more than 73 points Thursday, after widespread media coverage of the report. It dropped another 75 points Saturday despite repeated government appeals to remain calm.

Some observers have said China used the report to gauge Taipei's reaction to the latest rumours of an invasion, while others said it might be retaliation for Washington's granting of a transit visa to Mr. Li earlier this month.

Mr. Li was allowed to transit in the U.S. on his way to attend presidential inaugurations in Guatemala, and last week he applied for a second visa to attend the inauguration of the new Haitian president next month.

Washington has not yet replied to the second visa request, which China has slammed as "transit diplomacy," but sources say it is likely to be granted.

The granting of Mr. Li's

first visa request further tensed cross-strait relations, with recent reports that the U.S. aircraft carrier Nimitz passed through the strait last month adding fuel to the fire.

The Nimitz's passage prompted a formal protest from Beijing. Taiwan papers said, although Washington has said the move was not meant to intimidate China and was necessary because of bad weather.

It was the first time a U.S. aircraft carrier had cruised near Taiwan since Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979 and severed a 25-year-old mutual defence treaty with the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) government here.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lee denied he was to blame for the tense Taipei-Beijing ties. "Someone said I am the one who is to blame for the tension in the Taiwan Strait. It is totally untrue," Mr. Lee said, in an apparent response to criticism by his presidential campaign rivals.

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Jordan Times

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Public has right to know

MUCH TO the surprise of all Jordanians, the population census released Saturday failed to address many questions that have occupied the minds of people for some time. True Jordanians are Jordanians and there can be no legal or even political differences among them on the basis of sex, origin, religion or social and economic status. This much has been confirmed over and over again by His Majesty King Hussein. Yet the King and the Crown Prince have consistently called for the setting up and regular use of data banks in the country by decision-makers, researchers and journalists so that policy issues can be decided on solid and intelligent grounds.

The government, represented by the Bureau of Statistics, now defends the concealing of results arrived at by the 1994 census by maintaining that categorisation of Jordanians beyond the points already disclosed would be divisive or too controversial to be presented to the public as is. That is why the light shed on the census' results by the department head lacked information on the number of Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and why he likewise deleted any data on the number of minorities be they ethnic or religious.

In abstract terms it would be easy to assert that further categorisation of Jordanians could be divisive, but the reality tells another story. Let us take for example the new draft law on elections that aims to increase membership in the Lower House of Parliament to 100 or even 102. It will be noted that minorities are assigned a certain number of seats without the benefit of really knowing their number. Amman is accorded 22 seats, which is roughly about one-fifth of the Lower House at a time when its share of the total population is nearly one-third. Whatever happened to the one-man, one-vote principle as espoused internationally?

Jordanians have a stake in knowing the facts about themselves and the society they live in. Very few of them relish harbouring false illusions or expectations if the facts are kept in the drawers of the director general of the Department of Statistics alone. Besides, the way the census was conducted and the way people reacted to it entitles everyone to know the full range of results. When people were asked, for instance, to disclose their origin or religion, and they did answer in good faith, the least they could expect is to have the results reflected in the outcome of the census. Otherwise the Bureau should not have asked the kind of private questions that other peoples would not have normally answered on voluntary basis.

This latest case of the government not heeding in favour of telling the people what it has come to know through the people themselves is, to say the least, indefensible and the wrong example to give.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AHMAD SHAKER, a writer for Al Dustour, urged the Health Ministry and the Jordan Medical Association (JMA) to put an end to doctors' and specialists' disregard of rules governing medical practice in Jordan. According to the writer, many specialists charge patients more money for examining them using ultrasound and other equipment they might have in their clinics against the rules of the association. He said the JMA has ruled that such equipment is basic for examination, and the doctors should abide by the tariff as fixed by the association and the Health Ministry, charging more only for laboratory or X-ray tests. But regrettably many doctors resort to charging more for the use of such equipment, causing more sufferings for the patient and his family, continued the writer.

IT IS regrettable that government employees and private sector organisations are the only people totally committed to paying their income tax simply because their respective organisations deduct the tax from their salaries regularly while non-employees who own businesses often escape any payment, said Jamal Naji, a writer for Al Ra'i daily Sunday. According to the writer, real estate agents, owners of businesses and merchants submit to the Income Tax Department written evidence alleging that they have met losses and so they are exempted from paying tax, said the writer. In fact, this sector often secures astronomical profits from private businesses and gets away with them, stressed the writer.

Human Rights File

Elections in Poland — eye-opener for changes to election laws

By Dr. Waleed M. Sadi

A VERY INTERESTING thing happened in the wake of the election of Alexander Kwasniewski as the new president of Poland, at the end of 1995, which should open a new horizon for the democratic process worldwide, including of course Jordan.

It will be remembered that the former president of the country, Lech Walesa, challenged the results of the presidential elections on a ground that has never been raised before, as far as I know.

The losing president alleged then that the newly elected president had won on the basis of false pretences when he claimed to have been a university graduate at a time when he was not and therefore should be denied the fruits of his election.

This novel approach by an incumbent head of state to question the legitimacy of the election of his rival should not be allowed to slip away unexamined by all nations committed to democracy.

In essence, what Mr. Walesa was saying was that his opponent had won the elections by misrepresentation and that voters who supported him would not have done so had they known the full truth about his educational background.

Well, the answer to this line of questioning cannot be given in absolute terms. The reply has to be a qualified yes or no, depending on the nature of the alleged misrepresentations.

To begin with, it must be admitted that candidates for an elected office in almost all democracies make all sorts of promises and commitments which they either have no intention of honouring or would not be unable to do so anyway because of changed circumstances.

Usually members of constituencies would not cast their votes in the favour of an elected official who does not respect his political platform, but it has never been recorded that voters have legally questioned the election of an official on this point.

There is also no record of people whose election was challenged on the basis of alleged fraudulent misrepresentations.

view the new president's educational background as a legitimate ground for challenging his election.

People vote for a presidential or parliamentary candidate on the basis of many inter-related factors, the least of which is his or her university education or the lack of it.

The credibility of former Polish President Walesa on this score became increasing suspect after he appeared to have raised as many issues as possible in a desperate attempt to discredit the newly elected president.

It would be remembered that much was made about the fact that Mr. Kwasniewski was a Communist and part and parcel of the old regime that Mr. Walesa brought down almost single-handedly.

Even an accusation of spying for the Russians was made against the newly appointed Prime Minister Jozef Oleksy in a bid to discredit the government of the new president. Mr. Walesa looked more and more of a sour loser every time he started to dig out one issue after the other in an attempt to declare the election of his rival was illegal.

Still Mr. Walesa can be thanked for raising issues that have seldom been made in the past. In so doing, the former president made great contributions to the democratic process, by opening the eyes of peoples everywhere that elections must be conducted on the basis of vital information which is complete and accurate.

Elected officials must be held accountable for what they pretend to be and for their pledges and commitments.

It should be made possible to declare certain elections void when there is a prima facie case in support of fraudulent informations with intention to mislead. Election laws need to be amended in order to incorporate references to this dimension.

This subject should be of a particular interest to us here in Jordan where we are still trying to perfect our national law on elections. Would it not be in order to recognise that misrepresentation during elections is an issue that warrants redress? Now is, therefore, the time to introduce some provisions on this issue in the Jordanian Election Law.

Dole has bad week — but is he in trouble?

By Alan Elsner

Reuters

Washington — Last week was a bad one for Senate majority leader Bob Dole. The question is: was it just a bad week or is his bid for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination in trouble?

Mr. Dole's week began with a poll showing his lead over millionaire publisher Steve Forbes down to only eight points in the crucial state of New Hampshire, which holds the first presidential primary election of the campaign on Feb. 20.

It continued with the 72-year-old Dole's response to President Bill Clinton's State of the Union address, which was roundly criticised even by Republicans, both for its harshly partisan content and the leaden manner of its delivery.

"He looked old, tired and wooden," said conservative columnist Robert Novak.

The speech gave Mr. Dole's nomination rivals an opening to rap him as a sure loser against the polished and charismatic Clinton, who is unopposed for the Democratic nomination.

"It was a defining moment," argued Mike Murphy, an advisor to Republican presidential hopeful Lamar Alexander.

"Dole's words said Clinton stinks. The pictures said, it's time for new Republican leadership."

Mr. Dole responded with flashes of his famous temper, blaming the "liberal media" for the criticism, a sure sign he was feeling some heat.

The week ended with a new poll in Iowa, where Republicans stage the first major presidential prefer-



U.S. Senate majority leader and Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole waves to supporters as he waits to be introduced at a campaign event in New Hampshire (AFP photo)

ence vote of 1996 campaign two weeks from now. The survey showed Mr. Dole's support down to 26 per cent and Mr. Forbes closing in fast with 18 per cent.

Even Mr. Dole acknowledged his support was eroding. "Our tracking polls show we're going down a bit. We're hanging in there at about 31 or 32 percent," he said.

Many analysts believe Mr. Dole will still win the Republican nomination to face Mr. Clinton in the Nov. 5 election.

He retains a large advantage in money and organisation and none of his rivals, including the untested

nomination but as a weak candidate," said Robert Oldendick, a political scientist at the University of South Carolina.

He said many Republicans appeared to have soured on Mr. Dole in recent days after it became likely there would be no agreement with the White House on a balanced budget this year.

At the same time, weeks of negative advertising by Mr. Forbes are taking their toll. The speech, coming on top of all that, was a body blow.

"There's no doubt Dole hurt himself very badly but is there anyone in the Republican field who can take advantage? I'm not sure there is," said Peter Steinberger, a political scientist at Reed College in Portland, Oregon.

"But Republicans must be asking themselves whether he's going to look like a party old man against Clinton," he said.

There are big dangers ahead for Mr. Dole. The states of Iowa and New Hampshire have a way of derailing frontrunners.

Mr. Dole won in Iowa the last time he sought the Republican nomination in 1988 with 38 per cent of the vote. His poll standing there now is well below that mark.

New Hampshire has been an unhappy place for Mr. Dole. Both of his previous presidential bids foundered there, in 1980 and '88. This time, he has a formidable organisation but apparently little passion behind him.

And, the experts say, if Mr. Dole fails to win decisively in New Hampshire, all bets are off.

China's Jiang pushes to maintain Communist clout

By Jeffrey Parker

Reuters

BEIJING — If one theme has been constant in a spate of Chinese policy pronouncements it has been this: the Communist Party must remain supreme and unchallenged.

Whether in China's unrelenting attacks on official graft or new drives to repel "cultural trash" in favour of "moral purity" in the state, army and society, the party has sought to reverse a waning of its influence in 1.2 billion Chinese lives.

The inner workings of the world's last big ruling Communist Party remain shrouded in mystery, but analysts say the new ideological campaigns are clearly central to party chief Jiang Zemin's drive to emerge as the unrivalled heir to paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, his political patron.

Mr. Deng, now 91, remains China's ultimate leader despite his nominal retirement and frail health, although it is not known how active a role he is able to take in decision-making.

Recent Jiang moves aim to show he and his party are boss. Mr. Jiang has demanded total allegiance and a return to austere living by 50 million party members obliged to extend Communist power nationwide at a time when wealth is the national obsession.

In a September speech made public only in mid-January, Mr. Jiang ordered party leaders to stop enjoying themselves at nightclubs and dance halls and return to the puritan lifestyle espoused by the late Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

A few days later, Mr. Jiang targeted state media, which have thrived in a gradually relaxing atmosphere by wooing audiences with interesting content rather than mere ideology. After visits to key state media, Mr. Jiang convened a meeting of party propaganda mandarins in January and put ideological rectitude above even economic development.

"We must strictly ban the cultural trash poisoning the people and social atmosphere... We cannot sacrifice culture and ideology merely for a short period of economic development," Mr. Jiang was quoted by Xinhua news agency as saying. "The media must remain firmly in the hands of our party."

Since the party crushed the boldest challenge to its rule — the student-led Tiananmen pro-democracy protests of 1989 — Chinese have found comfort in the idea that Beijing, loath to use force again, saw year upon year of brisk economic growth as its best bet for staying off a Soviet-style party collapse.

Reform advocates say they hope Jiang's apparent belittling of economic growth reflects a political bid to disarm his own leftist critics rather than a more fundamental change in China's political direction. But absolute Communist power remains the common thread.

State media were blanketed Sunday with reports of party disciplinarians' new drive to rein in officials and army and police commanders whose allegiance has come into question.

The party's central discipline inspection commission issued "strict orders" to senior state and party officials to "uphold their political firmness and... Their ideological purity". It mandated "timely and serious handling" of offenders.

The party has also moved to assert its clout in Hong Kong, which returns to China in 1997, and in politically estranged Taiwan, using war games and veiled threats to underscore China's pledge to use force to halt moves towards Taiwan independence.

Beijing excluded Hong Kong's Democratic Party, the strongest among voters in the British colony, from membership in a high profile preparatory committee formed Friday to set up Hong Kong's post-1997 political institutions.

Taiwan has been shaken financially and emotionally in the past week by China's refusal to confirm or deny a U.S. newspaper report that it had plans for a "limited attack" on the island to follow Taiwan's March 23 presidential election.

China officially espouses a "one China, two systems" policy for reunification with Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Australian Labour looks back on 13 years of success

By Bradley Perrett

Reuters

CANBERRA — The ruling Australian Labour Party, to face an election on March 2 after an announcement by Prime Minister Paul Keating Saturday, overran its conservative opponent's territory after it won power in 1983.

The party abandoned mildly socialist policies to launch the country into an age of economic reform.

It did what the conservative Liberal-Nationals had talked of doing, and the tactic became a pattern for political success.

The new government, dominated by then Prime Minister Bob Hawke and then treasurer Keating, deregulated financial mar-

kets, cut the budget, slashed tariffs and exposed long protected corners of the economy to the harsh pressure of competition.

It left the liberal-nationals floundering.

What could they do? They could hardly applaud but neither could they oppose what they had always said they believed in.

The only option was to call for more reform, which appealed little to voters already suffering painful change.

Besides, it sounded disingenuous, because the Liberal-Nationals had never shown they could implement reform.

Hawke, a populist who loved the limelight, routed them in 1984, 1987 and 1991 while Keating, his unpopular alter-

ego who loved big-picture politics but disdained showmanship, pushed for more reform while waiting for Hawke to step aside.

Hawke and Keating were not alone. The ministry that Hawke assembled was widely regarded as unusually talented.

The conservatives kept switching leaders — one-time Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock failed as opposition leader in 1984, the former treasurer John Howard lost in 1987 and Mr. Hawke swatted Peacock in a second avian contest in 1990.

Mr. Hawke secretly agreed in 1989 to hand over to Mr. Keating, but later reneged. In 1991 Mr. Keating challenged him but lost and waited to challenge a second time late in the year.

The party ousted Mr. Hawke and Mr. Keating became prime minister.

But the campaign to undermine Mr. Hawke split the party and demolished its standing among voters.

Worse, a recession pushed by the unemployment rate to a 60-year high by the time the election was held in March 1993.

Labour hung on only because Mr. Keating, acknowledged as a brilliant political campaigner, was able to attack the unusually radical and detailed reform policies of the economist opposition leader John Hewson.

The current opposition leader is John Howard, again, and he has been careful to say little about what he would do if elected.

Iraq may see U.S. elections as factor in seeking oil sale

UNITED NATIONS (R) — A former U.N. official who negotiated with Iraq on an oil-for-food deal believes Baghdad may have calculated that U.S. elections in November would result in no relief from sanctions and that it might as well try now for a partial oil sales agreement.

Former Assistant Secretary-General Giandomenico Picco also suggested that France under President Jacques Chirac had moved closer to the tough U.S. position against any easing of the sanctions, imposed on Iraq shortly after its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

He was commenting, in an interview with Reuters, on talks expected to get under way soon between the United Nations and Iraq on a Security Council resolution permitting the sale of \$2 billion worth of Iraqi oil over six months to pay for urgently needed food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies for its sanctions-hit population.

No date for the start of the talks has been announced.

"In Baghdad, somebody may have come to the conclusion that the (U.S.) election will bring no change and therefore it is better to go for something now," said Mr. Picco, who was chief U.N. negotiator at talks with Iraq in Vienna in 1992 on a previous oil-for-food resolution which ended without result.

Baghdad has until now rejected any Security Council-authorised partial oil sales programme on grounds it involved close U.N. monitoring and other conditions that would violate its sovereignty.

In a surprise move on Jan. 19, Baghdad said it was prepared to enter talks, though diplomats remained uncertain whether it was ready to focus on the technicalities of carrying out the resolution or still wanted to alter its conditions, which Security Council members say is unacceptable.

"If they go for a partial sale now, I have to assume that their calculation is that the American elections will bring no change," said Mr. Picco, who resigned from the United Nations in 1992 and is now in private business.

Asked why a Republican victory in November would be in Iraq's favour, he said: "Don't forget that the Republicans were the allies of Saddam Hussein until 1990 in the war against Iran — militarily and political allies, as we know now."

He also said France had become "less encouraging of

the Iraqi position (of seeking an easing of sanctions) during the Chirac presidency. There has been a rapprochement between Paris and Washington on the Iraqi situation."

For the past three years "the French have pushed for some partial lifting of sanctions, but in the last six months I don't think the Chirac government had done that," he added.

Regarding prospects for the success of the oil-for-food talks, Mr. Picco said: "If the Iraqis offer a surprise, it will be very difficult for the other side to say no."

By "surprise" he said he meant if Iraq relaxed its objection to one or other of two major conditions set by Resolution 986, adopted last April.

These are that the larger share of any exported oil must flow through Turkey, rather than via Iraq's Gulf port of Mina Al Bakr, and that the United Nations would control the distribution of humanitarian supplies in the country's Kurdish-inhabited north.

He thought many ways could be found to leave the United Nations with a degree of control over distribution without infringing on Iraqi sovereignty.



Israeli policemen run for cover in clashes with Ethiopian Jews in West Jerusalem on Sunday (AFP photo)

Ethiopian Jews protest 'racism' in Israel

(Continued from page 1)

Mr. Peres' spokeswoman Aliza Goren said.

"On the other hand, he condemned very strongly the violent demonstration outside which resulted in the injuries of soldiers and policemen," she said.

Ethiopian Jews have frequently complained of racism, starting with the initial rejection of their clergy by Israeli religious authorities, since Israel secretly brought in tens of thousands of them in two massive airlifts in 1984-85 and 1991.

"Everything that is happening is because of colour," one woman protester said. "I felt it in the army and in my job from my boss. This cannot continue because we are one people — not two kinds of Jews. Colour doesn't matter."

Last week, the blood bank confirmed a newspaper report it routinely destroyed — out of fear of AIDS contamination — all blood donated by Ethiopians.

Although the blood bank avoided using their blood, it did not inform Ethiopian donors of the policy so as not to embarrass them, health officials said.

"We cannot have racism serving in top posts in Israel," telling us we smell," Addisu Messele, a leader of the Ethiopian community, said at the demonstration, demanding the resignation of Health Minister Ephraim Sneh.

"Each and everyone, men and women, young and old, soldiers, students, spiritual leaders and housewives are deeply humiliated, full of pain and enraged," Addisu Messele said.

Mr. Sneh said the rate of infection among Ethiopians by the HIV virus that causes AIDS was 50 times higher than in the general population. Addisu Messele said some of 300 Ethiopians in Israel carry the HIV virus.

A senior official at the ministry of health, who requested anonymity, said that 1,300 people in Israel are infected with the HIV virus and half of them are Ethiopians.

He added that 250 of the 350 people who have contracted AIDS in Israel are Ethiopian Jews.

Iraq names new man for U.N. contacts

(Continued from page 1)

"The Syrians know that Iraq historically represents the strategic depth of Syria and realise that it is a pillar if the Arabs want to be masters of their fate," the paper said.

"Iraq's call for Arab reconciliation responds to Arab aspirations in these difficult times," it said.

On the fifth anniversary of the start of the Gulf war on Jan. 17, President Saddam called for reconciliation with Arab countries which joined the U.S.-led coalition that freed Kuwait.

The article appeared as Syria and Iraq prepare to meet Feb. 10 in Damascus to discuss sharing the waters of the Euphrates. Both republics, Turkey, where the river rises, of taking too much water.

Iraqis are facing growing cuts in electricity partly because power plants stop working for lack of spare parts due to the sanctions, officials said.

Bosnia prisoner swap gains pace

SARAJEVO (Agencies) — The Bosnian Serbs freed 74 prisoners on Sunday as the delayed Bosnian POW exchange gathered pace. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) spokesman Pierre Gauthier said.

The Bosnian government also freed another 76 Serb prisoners to add to around 380 released by the Muslim and Croat factions on Saturday, he said.

The Bosnian Serbs' prisoners were brought from Foca and Vlasenica in eastern Bosnia to Sarajevo airport, where NATO and ICRC have been organising the handover.

Dragan Bulajic, head of the Bosnian Serb prisoner exchange commission, told reporters the Serbs were holding back three prisoners who had been due for release because they were scheduled to face investigation for alleged war crimes.

Mr. Gauthier said earlier the Serbs had freed 10 or 11 Croats late on Saturday or early on Sunday.

The Serbs were due to set free a total of 150 Muslim and Croat prisoners during the day, according to the ICRC, but by dusk there was no word whether the others had been released.

Mr. Gauthier also said the government was expected to free a handful of Serbs held in the eastern enclave of Gorazde.

The 76 Serb prisoners were taken from Travnik in central Bosnia to Koprivna near Sanski most in the northwest and freed.

The Muslim-led government, their Croat allies and the Serbs have all come under strong pressure from international mediators and aid donors to free prisoners in line with the Bosnia peace deal signed in Paris last month.

Both sides were still accusing the other of holding back some prisoners not on ICRC lists. Both the Serbs and the Croats have admitted to keeping some men as suspected war criminals.

Mr. Gauthier has accused the government of refusing the ICRC access to a prison in Tuzla in central Bosnia where it suspected a large number of Serbs was being held.

"This is unacceptable," he said.

The ICRC accepts all sides may be holding prisoners who have not been registered and Mr. Gauthier said investigations would continue. "We will not forget that maybe there are still some people in jails," Mr. Gauthier said.

Deputies trade insults

(Continued from page 1)

Mr. Rawabdeh, however, continued and described Deputy Abu Zant as "ill-mannered."

Mr. Dughmi, who was sitting next to Mr. Rawabdeh also shouted at Sheikh Abu Zant who was trying to protest their remarks.

"You are annoying us with your idiocies... shut up," Mr. Dughmi said.

Deputy Abu Zant called on the House speaker, Sa'ad Hayel Sour, who was trying to calm the deputies down, to order a 15-minute recess to enable the deputies to perform the evening prayers.

Deputy Dughmi protested and said: "The likes of you made us reject religion." His comment was directed at Sheikh Abu Zant.

Speaker Sour ordered the session adjourned for 15 minutes but Mr. Dughmi continued to throw insults at Sheikh Abu Zant and another verbal exchange developed between Mr. Dughmi and IAF deputy Ahmad Kasasbeh (Karak).

"He is not God's prophet on earth... he is not the custodian of religion..." said Mr. Dughmi, referring to Sheikh Abu Zant.

Deputy Kasasbeh meanwhile shouted back saying that such insults under the dome were not acceptable.

"His beard is purer than 60 persons of the likes of you," Mr. Kasasbeh said and dared Deputy Dughmi to meet him outside the Parliament building.

"Shame on you, you... insolent," Mr. Dughmi said.

Former Prime Minister Taher Masri also tried to calm the heated atmosphere. While the session resumed after the 15-minute recess, it did not last for long. Islamist Deputy Bassam Emoush (Zarqa) called for ordering it off since the "deputies were not psychologically prepared for discussions."

A private meeting followed between the government, centrist and Islamist deputies. There was no word on the outcome of the meeting.

Yemen pressures defiant tribe to free captive French tourists

SANAA (Agencies) — Yemeni authorities turned up the pressure on tribesmen holding 16 French tourists on Sunday refusing to meet their demands a day after two hostages were released, security sources said.

Armed security forces have been deployed in the south-eastern Shabwa province sealing off the village where the tourists have been held hostage since being kidnapped on Thursday.

The authorities ruled out concessions to the Al Asmara tribe demanding the release of a member imprisoned for kidnapping an American last year, the sources said.

The governor of the area said security forces might use military force to rescue the hostages if negotiations set for Sunday evening failed.

"This will be the last round of negotiations and if they continue to insist on their conditions we might use force to release the hostages," said Marib Governor Abdul Wali Al Shamiri said hours before negotiations with the tribesmen were due to start.

"The military forces are prepared to release the hostages (and can) guarantee their safety," he told Reuters.

Two Yemeni drivers and a translator were also abducted.

On Saturday, the tribe released one French hostage and one Yemeni driver. But the governor said the Frenchman who was freed returned to the group on Saturday night because his wife was still among the hostages.

The group was abducted in Marib governorate and taken to the Shabwa region, about 460 kilometres southeast of Sanaa. The tourists are aged between 48 and 85 and include 13 women.

"We are using different tribes from Marib and Shabwa during these negotiations in order to pressure the kidnappers. But this evening's negotiations will be the last."

If they fail we might use force to release the hostages," Mr. Shamiri said.

He said the tribesmen had toughened their demands.

"They are now asking the government to release Zubein Doman and issue an official apology for his detention through the media," Mr. Shamiri said.

Mr. Doman and another man are awaiting trial for the September kidnapping of American oil firm employee Bill Spencer and a Yemeni over a business dispute.

The Frenchman who was released told authorities later that the hostages, most of them elderly, were all in good health and had been taken on a tour of ancient Shabwa province by their kidnappers, Mr. Shamiri said.

In Paris, the foreign ministry confirmed that one of the hostages had been freed.

"The situation is evolving in a positive way," a ministry spokesman said without giving further details.

Assad, Hrawi discuss peace

(Continued from page 1)

negotiations moving again. The formal talks are due to resume Monday.

Officials hope to narrow the differences between the two sides before U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher begins a new round of shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Syria on Feb. 5.

Mr. Rabinovich said last week's discussions had failed to bridge differences over the central issue of security and water-sharing arrangements that would follow an eventual Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

"There has been some progress on normalising bilateral relations, but the

Jordan reaffirms support

(Continued from page 1)

Palestinian "economic projects, especially those concerning investment."

In comments carried by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Omar Khatib, head of the Palestinian diplomatic mission in Amman, described the King's meeting with Mr. Arafat as a major step in establishing an independent Palestinian state and ensuring the rights of the Palestinian people.

Having secured a mandate from his constituency, Mr. Arafat now faces the task of advancing his quest for Palestinian independence in the final status negotiations, and his visit to Jordan and to Egypt on Saturday were seen as aimed at reinforcing the Jordanian and Egyptian support for the negotiating stands of the Palestinians.

The final status negotiations would cover the thorny issues of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements and borders of the Palestinian territories.

Jordanian officials have said that the Kingdom would like to strengthen the Palestinian stand in the negotiations, particularly because the issues of Jerusalem, which contains some of the holiest shrines in Islam and Christianity, and of Palestinian refugees living in camps in the Middle East were not limited to the Palestinian negotiators since any setback on those two issues would have repercussions on the wider Muslim world and the countries which host the Palestinian refugees, including Jordan.

Attending the King's talks with Mr. Arafat were His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker and senior officials. Mr. Arafat was accompanied by Mahmoud Abbas, a member of the PLO executive committee, advisor Hani Al Hassan, and outgoing PNA economy Minister Mohammad Zuhdi Nashashibi, who stayed back in Amman to reactivate the joint committees and discuss joint economic projects.

Meanwhile, several Amman-based PNC members said they were told to be on standby for a meeting with Mr. Arafat but were not subsequently contacted. The planned meeting was to have focused on convening a PNC session to amend clauses in the Palestinian charter that implies a call for the elimination of Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said last week that the final status negotiations with Mr. Arafat could come only after the clauses were removed and that Israel would welcome all PNC members who live outside the West Bank and Gaza to return permanently to the territories and attend PNC deliberations on amending the charter. PNC members are split over the Israeli invitation, with some of them saying that the charter should not be amended before Israel agrees to the Palestinians' demand for an independent state.

In comments to the press upon his arrival here Saturday night, Mr. Arafat said: "There will be these four basic points (Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and the shape of the Palestinian entity) and we look to King Hussein's support and help on them."

King Hussein reiterated Jordan's support for the Palestinians' quest for an independent state and said: "I emphasise once again we are fully supportive and we will do all what we can to help our brethren achieve their objectives for their national soil. I am very happy indeed with my brother's visit to Jordan."

Palestinians seek coalition

(Continued from page 1)

trend, Musa Kadoura and Abdul Fatah Hamayel, won with high votes in the Ramallah area and are now engaged in the deliberations to form a democratic coalition in the council.

"I have no reservations whatsoever in finding common grounds with non-Fateh council members. In fact we have a lot in common," says Mr. Hamayel, who has become a symbol to non-conformists in Fateh since winning the highest votes in regional Fateh elections in late 1994. Mr. Arafat had then stopped Fateh regional elections after the defeat of his loyalists in Ramallah.

Fateh members who are ready to work with independents include Salah Al Ta'amari, a former military commander who secured the highest votes in Bethlehem, again despite instructions by Mr. Arafat not to run.

But while Dr. Abdul Shafi and Mr. Saleh are critical of the Oslo agreements, most Fateh members who ran against Mr. Arafat's will say that they have total confidence in Mr. Arafat's long-term negotiating strategy.

"I have no doubts in Arafat's unwavering commitment to our national interests. Arafat will not compromise the Palestinian national rights," says Mr. Ta'amari.

Consequently it is unclear if the Fateh independents will back any attempt to change Mr. Arafat's negotiating tactics.

But Fateh activists like Mr. Hamayel, Mr. Kadoura and Mr. Ta'amari agree with Dr. Abdul Shafi on one fundamental point that could form the basis of a broad coalition — to lay the basis for a democratic system.

"The elections have unleashed the Palestinian giant and triggered a national democratic revolution," says Mr. Ta'amari.

Along with Dr. Abdul Shafi, Mr. Saleh, Hanan Ashrawi and Fateh Central Committee member Abbas Zaki, Mr. Ta'amari is considered one of the top leaders of the council.

All except Mr. Zaki were not endorsed in any way by the PNA and they could form a strong leadership.

However, Mr. Zaki is not excluded as stronger 'player in some form of a collective leadership of the council. Mr. Zaki, a former critic of the Oslo agreements, appeared to have shifted his position after he returned to Hebron last September.

But the election day indicated that Mr. Arafat did not trust Mr. Zaki's change of heart. Even though Mr. Zaki was on the official Fateh list, there was a campaign against him allegedly orchestrated by the preventive security force on the elections day.

When this reporter visited Hebron and the surrounding villages on that day, there were strong rumours that Mr. Arafat had withdrawn his support for Mr. Zaki. The rumours were backed by the fact that many copies of the official Fateh list obtained by the Jordan Times did not include Mr. Zaki's name. In some lists Mr. Zaki's name was scrapped and Mr. Zaki's supporters claimed that in the first hour of the balloting security agents were telling people that Mr. Zaki had pulled out.

Such accounts were heard in all areas where Fateh independents who are critical of the PNA were running. The hidden war within Fateh left many

bitter feelings, but in Ramallah, Hebron and Bethlehem the targets of the rumours emerged victorious.

Nevertheless, such PNA tactics, according to the winners, showed them the struggle for democracy was even more difficult than was anticipated.

In fact the campaigns against critics of the PNA among the Fateh candidates were an important factor that had convinced them, for now at least, to cooperate with Dr. Abdul Shafi's drive to resist what the Gaza physician who captured the highest votes in the elections calls "Arafat's autocratic authority."

Moreover, a good number of Fateh winners, especially those who ran outside the official list, are convinced that there were many violations that were supported by the local authorities.

"There has been foul play in the sense that there were candidates that the authority wanted to win and they were found to be losing. Thus everything was done to ensure their win," says a winner who asked for anonymity.

According to sources from Fateh and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), polling centres in many areas, especially remote villages, remained opened beyond the 7 o'clock deadline to bring "supporters" of some key candidates who were losing.

Some even claim that the riddle of the "missing ballot boxes" in Hebron and other areas had more to do with foul play than anything. In Khan Younes, an attempt by a leading Fateh candidate to count ballots "in a missing box" led to a limited armed confrontation. According to a top PLO official, Mr. Arafat had to personally interfere to defuse the situation. The "missing box," it turned out, did not include enough votes to ensure the victory of the Fateh candidate there, PLO officials said.

Contradictory results also raised many questions. The official Palestinian radio, within less than hour after vote counting started, announced that Rawayah Shawwa from Gaza a winner but later declared her a loser. She contested the results and was announced a winner 48 hours later. Marwan Kanafani, Mr. Arafat's former spokesman, was also announced a loser first but a winner in less than an hour later.

Such incidents were criticised by some Fateh winners who fear that Fateh and the council could be dominated by a clique of traditional Fateh leaders who have come back with Mr. Arafat from the diaspora.

But that does not mean that the opposition bloc in the legislative council will necessarily reflect a division between homegrown leaders and those who come back from the diaspora.

"According to the results, at least 17 of the winners are leaders who were brought to the fore by the intifada. But many of them had been totally won over by Mr. Arafat and are not expected to join the aspired-for coalition for democracy."

"There will be a sharp polarisation inside Fateh," predicts Mr. Hamayel. "There will be those who will assume new roles based on personal interests and those who will choose to find new means to continue our political struggle for independence."

The second category, in his view, will form coalitions beyond Fateh. If his prediction is true, the next stage will witness the emergence of a new force that will move beyond all of the current Palestinian factional lines.

PNA, Hamas in new deal

(Continued from page 1)

ues created by the polls.

In the vote, Mr. Arafat was overwhelmingly elected the first Palestinian president and his Fateh movement dominated a parallel vote for an 88-member self-rule council.

Hamas permitted a number of its militants to run as independents, five of whom won seats in the legislative council.

Under an earlier agreement reached in Cairo, Hamas refrained from carrying out anti-Israeli attacks during the election campaign, despite having vowed to avenge the assassination by presumed Israeli agents of one of its leading guerrilla chiefs, Yehiya Ayash.

But over the weekend a suspected Hamas militant was killed when a bomb he was building in apparent preparation for an anti-Israeli attack blew up on him in the West Bank village of Samua.

Neighbours told AFP the dead man, Ahmad Salem Abu Saif, 22, was a known Hamas member who had spent time in Israeli jails.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas.

Saturday's meeting "discussed how to keep Palestinian national areas secure" and was "very fruitful and positive."

He also said the two sides began "to prepare for upcoming municipal elections and to draft an election law for the polls."

Municipal elections are due to be held in the PNA-controlled areas of the Gaza Strip and West Bank before the summer in what is expected to be a heated contest between Hamas and the PNA.

Hamas remains vehemently opposed to Mr. Arafat's step-by-step strategy for achieving peace with Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state and has claimed responsibility for anti-Israeli attacks which have left scores dead.

But the movement was seriously weakened by the resounding failure of its boycott of the Jan. 20 Palestinian elections and Hamas leaders have acknowledged they must now adjust their strategy to the "new reali-

Abul Ragheb rules out reversing accord on reduced Jordanian exports to Iraq

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff reporter

AMMAN — Industry and Trade Minister Ali Abul Ragheb Sunday ruled out any reversal of the government's move to reduce Jordanian exports to Iraq.

"The decision was agreed upon by both parties and the agreement was signed by myself and my Iraqi counterpart," Mohammad Mehdi Saleh, Mr. Abul Ragheb said. "There cannot be any reversal of the move now."

Mr. Abul Ragheb was replying to a Jordan Times question on reports that the local business community was lobbying the government to reverse the decision to reduce to \$220 million the export credit guarantees that Jordan offers to Iraq.

Until now, the Jordanian government used to extend \$400 million every year in export guarantees to Iraq, offered through an escrow account at the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ).

The account was supported by Iraqi oil supplies to Jordan exempt from the international sanctions against Iraq.

Senior officials said the move had no political bearings and that it was warranted by Jordan's need to build its own foreign exchange reserves.

According to the officials, the Iraqi exports to Jordan could settle only part of the Kingdom's food and medicine exports to Iraq and the rest was being accumulated in Iraqi debts to Jordan, now estimated at \$1.2 billion.

Mr. Abul Ragheb told the Jordan Times Sunday: "Any increase in exports to Iraq under the protocol means an increase in the Iraqi debts to

Jordan, and we simply cannot afford to do so."

Mr. Abul Ragheb said the issue of Jordanian exports to Iraq was not discussed in his talks with Iraqi Industry Minister Adnan Abdul Majeed, who visited Amman over the weekend.

"The focus of the discussions was the work of the Jordanian-Iraqi Industrial Company and plans to convene a general assembly meeting of the company," said Mr. Abul Ragheb.

The Amman Chamber of Industry (ACI) said, meanwhile, it plans to send a delegation to Baghdad to work out a new structure for Jordanian exports to Iraq.

The ACI moves come amid intense debate in the local press over the pros and cons of the Jordanian move to reduce its exports of goods and services to Iraq.

The reduction in exports under the protocol has upset the local business community.

"We have made strong representations to the government, arguing that any reduction in exports to Iraq would have a very negative impact on local industries," said Ali Dajani, advisor to ACI Chairman Khalidoun Abu Hassan.

"Many industries have already processed products for exports to Iraq, and they will suffer immense losses if they could not execute the orders from Iraq," said Mr. Dajani.

Mr. Dajani said Mr. Abu Hassan were expected to lead a Jordanian trade and industry delegation to Iraq early next month to discuss the issue and seek formulas which would avoid losses for Jordanian industries whose main market is Iraq.

Mr. Dajani did not reveal details of the ACI strategy, but local businessmen said the visiting delegation would seek to convince the Iraqi government to channel some of its orders for cash imports to Jordan.

"There is a minimum level of Iraqi imports for cash," said a businessman. "Obviously we could try to get some of those orders although it is highly unlikely that Baghdad would look favourably upon such demands."

According to officials, Jordan is now awaiting Iraq to formally specify the kind and volume of Jordanian products it would like to be included in the protocol.

"The goods should be worth a total of \$150 million this year. The rest is in services, including the transport of exported goods to Iraq," said one official.

Meanwhile commentators in the local press have criticised the government decision.

Fahed Fanek, a noted Jordanian economist, wrote in the Al Ra'i daily on Saturday that while it was "easy to leave an export market, it is difficult to return to it."

Dr. Fanek said the reduction in exports to Iraq would reflect negatively on the Kingdom's overall exports, particularly at a time when the country is following a policy of export-led economic growth.

Other commentators in the market said shares at the Amman Financial Market (AFM) would suffer severe losses in value since many of the local companies have strong business connections with Iraq.

Iranian parliament adopts austerity budget

TEHRAN (AFP) — The parliament has adopted an austerity budget for the next Iranian year under the shadow of an economic crisis and mounting U.S. pressure.

The final draft voted by the assembly, 61,034 billion rials (\$35 billion) were allocated for the state budget, an increase of 40 per cent over the current year which ends on March 21.

However, according to official figures, inflation was estimated at 60 per cent for the next nine months.

Earnings from oil exports will comprise 28 trillion rials of the state revenue, although the parliament cut the government's calculated earnings from the sale of a barrel of crude from \$15.5 to \$15.

Without elaborating, President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said last month that he had taken into account "difficulties created" by the U.S. economic embargo on Iran in preparing his budget draft.

The sanctions, imposed in June to punish Iran for its alleged support of international terrorism, has affected both the country's oil production capacity and its ability to market its exportable crude, a fourth of which were previously purchased by American companies.

Mr. Rafsanjani has put his country's oil production capacity at 3.9 million barrels per day (b/d), which is below the 4.1 million b/d previously claimed by officials.

The parliament adopted a \$20 million budget to thwart U.S. covert action against the Islamic republic and finance its own activities against the "Great Satan."

The move was in response to Washington's decision last month to give its secret service \$20 million for action aimed at moderating Iran.

Clinton urges Congress to raise debt ceiling

WASHINGTON (R) — U.S. President Bill Clinton urged Congress Sunday to "stop playing politics" and raise the government's legal debt limit so that it can increase its borrowings and avoid defaulting on its financial obligations.

In his weekly radio address aired less than a day after he signed emergency legislation to avert a third government shutdown, the president said an unprecedented default by the government on its debt could lead to higher interest rates and halt the mailing of social security checks.

"Our unbroken record of keeping our word could end, with taxpayers bearing the cost for years to come, because interest rates would go up on United States obligations," said Mr. Clinton.

"And for tens of millions of Americans the unthinkable could happen: the social security checks they count on would not be able to be mailed out," he said.

"So Congress should act responsibly and stop playing politics with America's good name," he added. "Let our government pay its bills."

On Friday, the Senate rejected with a vote of 46-45 a Democratic proposal to raise the limit on the national debt to \$5.4 trillion from the current \$4.9 trillion.

Although the government actually reached its borrowing limit in November, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin has used two civil servant pension, or trust, funds to avoid defaulting on maturing government securities.

But Mr. Rubin has warned Congress that his options for dodging default are running out and estimated that the government will run out of borrowing power by March 1. Congress is to adjourn at the end of next week and will have no opportunity to act until it returns on Feb. 26.

"In order to avoid endangering the March 1 social security checks, Congress should pass a straightforward, long-term debt limit immediately," Mr. Clinton said.

House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich declined to react to Mr. Clinton's address, but said he believes Congress and the White House will reach an

agreement to avoid default. "I think we'll find some way to do it," he told reporters before conducting a town hall meeting in Roswell, Georgia. "I think we'll easily meet the deadline."

Last week, Moody's Investors Service said the threat of a default could prompt it to consider downgrading its highest AAA rating on \$387 billion in medium- and long-term debt coming due Feb. 29 and April 1. U.S. debt traditionally has been considered risk free in terms of repayment.

Mr. Clinton signed an emergency spending bill before midnight Friday that had been passed hours earlier by the Senate. It prevented a third government shutdown on Saturday by keeping the government open until March 15.

But the measure cuts spending on many programmes, including some favoured by Mr. Clinton. He complained that lawmakers had failed to send him a complete 1996 spending bill, adding that it was inappropriate to govern by continuing resolution.

Mr. Clinton accused the Republican-controlled Congress, especially "some in the House of Representatives," of using the debt ceiling — by withholding approval of an increase or by attaching politically charged amendments to it — to try to push their agenda in budget negotiations.

In the Republican response, first-term Senator Judd Gregg of New Hampshire accused Mr. Clinton of being inconsistent.

"While Republicans in Congress have actually delivered on the promises we made to America, and while we always welcome the president's support, his sincerity about working together to fulfil our goals is too often fleeting with no real action to back up his words," said Mr. Gregg.

"This inconsistency we cannot afford," he added. "We must pass on to our children the opportunity for prosperity, and to do that we must pass a true balanced budget. This is something Republicans are unalterably committed to."

Sudanese businessmen warn against falling currency

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudanese businessmen raised an alarm at the unprecedented fall in the Sudanese pound against foreign currencies, the government daily Al Engaz Al Watani reported Sunday.

The Sudanese Businessmen Association (SBA) warned of "grave economic and social repercussions, including a decline in the standards of living of the poor, capital erosion and capital flight," the paper said.

An unnamed SBA official pinned the pound's fall on the state's budget deficit of 25 per cent, calling on the government to rein in its spending.

He also called for import tariffs on luxury items to be increased and border supervision of trade to be tightened to increase custom revenues.

The SBA also blamed the falling pound on provincial authorities who buy hard currency off the black market to finance large television, telephone and infrastructure projects, the paper said.

The Sudanese pound traded last week at 850 to the dollar in banks, around 950 to the dollar in private exchanges and 1,200 to the dollar on the black market.

Last September, when the creation of private exchange offices was legalised, the pound went for 500 to the dollar in banks and 600 on the black market.

The government allowed private exchanges in a bid to strengthen the pound, but instead caused an unprecedented fall in value.

Meanwhile, Sudanese bounced \$24 million worth of checks in 1995, up dramatically from the previous year, and officials have called on Interpol to hunt down the culprits, a legal official said Sunday.

Kamal Mahjub, deputy attorney general for banking violations, said his office had paid on about \$4 million from the total \$24 million compensation to victims of the

bad checks. More than 2,000 people are being investigated for check fraud, while Khartoum has contacted Interpol to hunt down others who bounced checks and fled the country, Mr. Mahjub said, quoted by the daily Al Khbar Al Youm.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR MONDAY, JANUARY 29, 1996

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) This is a good day to see one who can give you support you need. Listen carefully to advice given to you.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You think in a practical vein today and can establish new conditions which will improve your status in life.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) If you contact those in business who can give you financial pointers you need, you can have excellent results later today.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Any talks with partners today should be approached pleasantly so that you have long relationships which are worthwhile.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Handle your tasks so that you gain greater benefits later today. Gain the cooperation of fellow associates.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Seek out those prominent people who can best help you to further your finest talents. Take a good friend out tonight.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Study how best to make your home more charming and functional far later today, and please your kin also.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Be more practical in stating your ideas to fellow associates. Be sure to make arrangements with good friends.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Get busy today planning just how to gain a personal wish, the influences are fine for doing so.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Increase your activities with those who count the most in your life, and get better results. Dress well and you will be very successful.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) This is a good day to discuss quietly with a backer just where you are headed in several spheres of your endeavour.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Go out with some fine friend to a new place which has long fascinated you today, and you will feel uplifted.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

China-Arab trade reaches \$4b

CAIRO (AFP) — Trade between Arab states and China rose to \$4 billion in 1995, an Arab League official said on Sunday, calling for strengthening of Sino-Middle Eastern ties.

"The size of trade between China and Arab states reached \$4 billion in 1995, and we are working to increase this in the coming period," the new head of the League's mission in Beijing,

Abdul Wahhab Sakit, said.

The next year "will see a great increase in all fields between the Arab World and China," said Mr. Sakit, who was formerly the head of the League delegation to Hong Kong and will leave to take his new post Saturday.

"Stability cannot be achieved in Asia or the entire world without the participation of the People's Republic of China," he added.

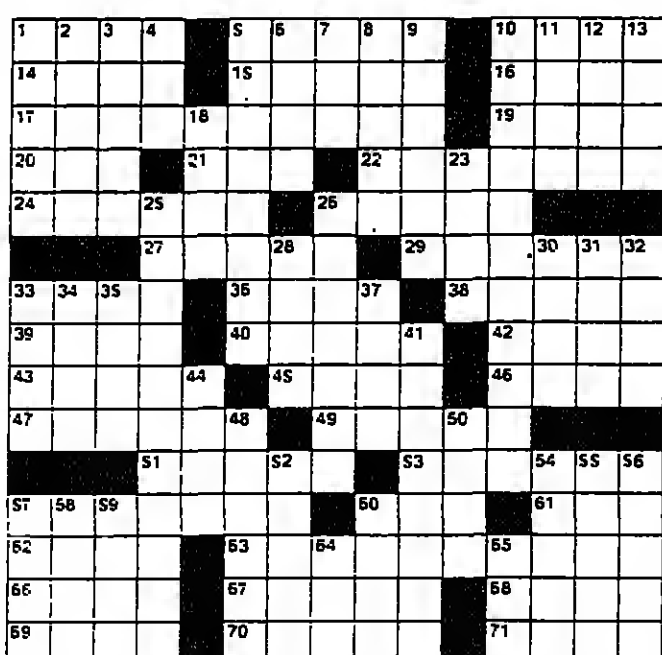
In a letter to the Chinese foreign ministry, League head Esmat Abdul Meguid underlined "the importance of China's continuing role in supporting Arab rights and action to achieve a complete and just peace in the Middle East."

Mr. Abdul Meguid called for "a strengthening of Sino-Arab relations in all political, economic, commercial and cultural fields."

THE Daily Crossword by Norma Steinberg

ACROSS

- 1 Family member
- 5 Loathed
- 10 Aid in wrongdoing
- 14 Author unknown abbr
- 15 — and lucking
- 16 Meander
- 17 Beast
- 19 Str up
- 20 Summer in
- 21 Investment choice abbr
- 22 Long-lasting
- 24 Sprinkles
- 26 Austin citizen
- 27 Put on a pedestal
- 29 Christmas drink
- 30 Temporary gift
- 36 Monastery man
- 38 Take care of
- 39 "Lang Syne"
- 40 Sortie-like
- 42 Spouse
- 43 Angry expression
- 45 "Damn Yankees" heroine
- 46 God of love
- 47 "The rub"
- 49 Miller's salesman
- 51 Princeton walls are
- 53 Blackmail
- 57 Actress Bateman
- 60 Actor Wallace
- 61 "Bali"
- 62 Single entity
- 63 Member of a wedding
- 66 — ranch
- 67 Buenos —
- 68 Art Deco artist
- 69 August
- 70 Martin and Stockwell
- 71 Takes home after taxes

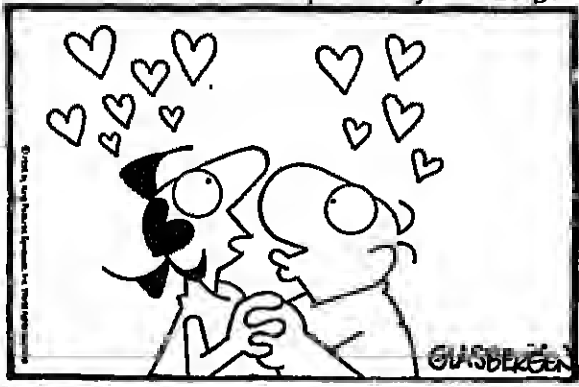


Yesterday's puzzle solved

W.A.R.O. A.T.B.A.I.T. A.I.S.E.A.
A.R.E.A. C.A.U.S.E. N.I.O.R.N.
L.I.L.Y. T.O. M.I.L.I.N. G.N.A.I.T.
T.A.I.L.O.R. B.A.I.T.T.I.E.N.I.S.
S.I.C.O.R.N.'S. E.L.I.Y.
N.I.S.I.U.I.S. R.I.E.U.B.E.N.
B.A.I.O.G.E. O.U.I.S.E. S.I.O.'A.
A.L.I.I. S.H.A.L.L.O.W. N.E.I.V.
N.I.E.I.A.T. A.I.N.K.A. E.I.B.O.I.N.Y.
G.E.I.N.I.A.I.L. S.K.I.E.I.R.
A.I.N.Y. E.I.N.V.I.T.E.R.
T.R.I.E.S.T.E. S'I.O.I.E.S.
S.I.H.O.I.E. T.O.I.M.I.S.E. L.I.L.I.E.C.K.
H.I.E.S.I.S. A.I.R.M.O.I.R. E.I.C.I.E.
E.A.S.T. Y.E.I.A.S.T. S.I.T.A.G.

- 2 Law professor: Hill
- 3 Warsaw natives
- 4 Plus
- 5 Good-looking
- 6 Baba and MacGraw
- 7 Tiny
- 8 Avoid
- 9 Top of the line
- 10 Disposition
- 11 Ninny
- 12 Satan's concern
- 13 Far, pre!
- 18 Passed a test easily
- 23 Cleaning cloths
- 25 Like signatures
- 26 Times live, twice
- 28 Croissant
- 30 Close by
- 31 — von Bismarck
- 32 Takes off
- 33 Final
- 34 Pained cry
- 35 Skin cream ingredient
- 37 Weight measure
- 41 Undertied
- 42 Son of Jacob
- 48 — the sailor
- 50 Central line
- 52 Weird
- 54 Chicago airport
- 55 Singer Bonnie
- 56 "Pnce of —"
- 57 Marial art
- 58 E pluribus —
- 59 Faction
- 60 "East of —"
- 64 Author Levin
- 65 Chess pieces

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen



Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



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Lebanese bank increases capital to \$100m

BEIRUT (R) — Beirut's Banque de la Méditerranée has increased its capital to 160 billion Lebanese Liras (\$100 million), making it Lebanon's biggest bank in terms of capital, chairman and general manager Mustafa Razian has said.

The operation, which increased capital from 75 billion Liras was carried out in mid-December, Mr. Razian told Reuters in an interview. It put Banque de la Méditerranée well ahead in capital terms of its nearest rival, Banque Audi, which increased its capital in October to \$74 million through an issue of \$34 million in global depositary receipts (GDR).

Construction since October 1992. The capital increase would raise Méditerranée's lending limit to \$20 million per project, allowing it to play a bigger role in national reconstruction, Mr. Razian said.

"Most Lebanese banks have been excluded from big reconstruction projects because of their low capital base," he said. "So an increase of capital became essential to compete for larger projects with foreign banks."

"By doing this, we hope to encourage other banks to improve their capital base," he added.

The capital base of Lebanon's banks was drastically undermined during and after the 1975-90 civil war by hyper-inflation and the collapse of the Lebanese Lira. Some of the 83 banks have begun rebuilding capital since

Mr. Hariri took office and restored the stability of the Lira.

"We have also obtained a license for Méditerranée Investment Bank," Mr. Razian said. Final procedures for establishing it with 10 billion Liras (\$6.3 million) capital would be begun shortly.

"It's going to be a very active investment bank in terms of financing major investment projects in the area," Mr. Razian said.

"It is aimed at meeting the increased demand for financing large projects in Lebanon but we hope to expand to the region to cover Syria and Jordan," he added.

The decision to create an investment bank follows the formation last year of a finance company, Indo-Suez Capital Moyen-Orient, which is 40 per cent owned by Banque de la Méditerranée and

60 per cent by France's Banque Indo-Suez.

"The purpose of the finance company is to arrange for the financing of construction and commercial projects. It is currently working on several projects," Mr. Razian said.

The Méditerranée Group was developing a strategy of specialisation to meet consumer demand and develop new products. "We are talking retail banking, corporate banking and investment banking — including them all in our services," Mr. Razian said.

Banque de la Méditerranée

and its sister Saudi Lebanese Bank have 27 branches in Lebanon. Méditerranée plans to expand, specially in south Lebanon, he added.

Mr. Razian said the capital increase was part of a series of developments last year at Banque Méditerranée and Saudi Lebanese Bank, which is also owned by Mr. Hariri and headed by Mr. Razian as chairman and general manager.

Méditerranée took a 75 per cent share in Saudi Lebanese, previously 100 per cent owned by Mr. Hariri, his family and associates, he said.

The role of Saudi Lebanese

Bank would now be principally to develop relations with potential clients from the Gulf.

The ownership of Banque Méditerranée was also brought home to Lebanon by the creation of Beirut-based Méditerranée Investors Group (Liban), S.A., holding, to replace Méditerranée Investors Group, S.A., of Luxembourg which previously held the bank's shares.

Banque de la Méditerranée ranked second among Lebanon's banks in 1994 in total assets and deposits and was first in terms of loans and shareholders' equity.

Quake finance woes cause Japan bankruptcy record

TOKYO (R) — Total debts of bankrupt Japanese companies surged to their highest level ever in 1995, a result of

the devastating Kobe earthquake and a string of financial sector failures, a private research company has said.

Total debts were up 64.1 per cent to 9.24 trillion yen (\$87.1 billion) and the number of bankruptcies climbed to 15,108, the highest level since 1986, Tokyo Commerce and Industry Research Co (TSR) said.

Bankruptcies in nearly all industrial sectors rose in 1995 from the year before, with debts highest in the financial sector.

The leap was caused first by the earthquake in January that devastated the major port city of Kobe in western Japan.

That was followed by the failures of Hyogo Bank and Kizu Credit Union, which were Japan's 13th and 15th largest postwar bankruptcies and triggered financial problems for many related companies.

The two financial institutions had suffered from huge unrecoverable loans after the bursting of Japan's bubble economy of inflated asset prices of the late 1980s. Kizu was Japan's largest credit union in terms of deposits.

Another round of problems was triggered by the failure in August of Nishiki Finance Co, which brought down a number of related companies.

Nishiki Finance had lent short-term funds to small firms, taking promissory notes as collateral, and suffered when the slump in the Japanese economy that began in its early 1990s forced many of its clients into bankruptcy. About 554 companies suffered damage from Nishiki Finance's problems, TSR said.

A high yen, tight-fisted consumer spending and other problems had contributed to the rise in bankruptcies, it said.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET			
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHAMSANI			
TELEPHONE: 607172 / 607173			
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST 28/01/1996			
COMPANY'S NAME	MT. OP	VALUE	PREV. CLOSING
	SHARES	TRADED	PRICE
			TRADING
ARAB BANK PLC	780	180780	234.000 231.800
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK	450	19325	4.300 4.300
BANK OF JORDAN	59000	188100	3.500 3.422
MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT BANK	50350	60298	1.200 1.180
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK	580	1458	2.650 2.650
THE BUILDING BANK	1500	7170	4.780 4.780
JORDAN KAWAT BANK	362	900	2.700 2.700
JORDAN GULF BANK	202350	208421	1.040 1.040
JORDAN ISLAMIC BANK	4978	18516	3.720 3.720
BUSINESS BANK	1000	3179	3.250 3.130
ARAB BANK FOR INVESTMENT	4902	8768	1.850 1.850
PHILADELPHIA INVESTMENT BANK	2.77	2775	1.310 1.300
BANKS & BROKERS	327339	680329	123.88 123.88
			CHANGE: -1.032
JORDAN TRADING CORPORATION	4225	1342	2.890 2.700
JORDAN GULF INSURANCE	1935	2904	2.650 2.752
INSURANCE SECTOR	5850	18249	INDEX NUMBER: 129.01
			CHANGE: +0.057
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	1494F	28128	1.630 1.680
JORDAN RIVER WATER	400	928	2.300 2.320
ARAB ESTATE INVESTMENT	378	259	1.580 1.490
MAINTENANCE EQUIP. MOVING & MAINTENANCE	280	282	1.220 1.200
UNION MIDDLE EAST & COMMERCIAL HOTELS	100	210	2.120 2.100
ARAB INTER. FOR INVESTMENT & EDUCATION	1050	3424	3.450 3.450
ARAB PRIVATE UNIVERSITY	450	822	1.170 1.160
UNIFIED CO. FOR ORGANIZING LAND TRANS.	200	434	2.200 2.270
SERVICES SECTOR	17741	31407	INDEX NUMBER: 128.33
			CHANGE: -0.007
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	10490	17583	3.580 3.580
THE ARAB POTASH	380	2897	5.420 5.420
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINERY	3525	38072	9.720 9.700
THE INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL & AGRICULTURAL	100	352	3.550 3.520
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	1798	7892	4.450 4.380
JORDAN DAIRY	1280	3463	2.850 2.850
THE JORDAN PAPER MANUFACTURING	150	560	2.350 2.320
DAR AL DAWA DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT	1010	7118	7.050 7.050
ARAB ALUMINIUM INDUSTRIES	314	3148	5.440 5.400
LESTERK & POPULAR	8600	4675	1.500 1.500
ARAB POWER CONVERTING & TRADING	2400	4643	1.380 1.380
NATIONAL INDUSTRIES	2300	2213	970 970
INTERMEDIATE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	500	700	1.450 1.400
JORDAN WOODWORK INDUSTRIES	1000	963	980 980
UNIVERSITY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT	0.7	258	3.120 3.120
JORDAN INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES CO.	1210	2808	1.860 1.860
JORDAN MAN CABLE COMPANY	1750	2346	1.350 1.340
INTERNATIONAL TOBACCO & CIGARETTES	2850	3040	1.350 1.350
UNION GENERAL & VEHICLE CO. - INDUSTRIAL	7900	11940	1.520 1.500
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	49598	134560	INDEX NUMBER: 120.88
			CHANGE: -0.181
GRAND TOTAL	400358	861945	INDEX NUMBER: 152.48
			CHANGE: -0.607
NO. OF TRADED SHARES IN PARALLEL MARKET	94212		
VALUE TRADED IN PARALLEL MARKET	74913		

Financial Jordan Times			
in co-operation with			
Cairo Amman Bank			
New York Closing Rates for Major Currencies Against the U.S. Dollar			
Currency	Jan. 26, 1996	Jan. 26, 1996	Percent Change
Swiss Franc	1.5105	1.5035	(0.46) %
Deutsche Mark	1.4813	1.4915	(0.75) %
Swiss Franc	1.1925	1.2102	(1.50) %
French Franc	5.9535	5.1345	(1.58) %
Japanese Yen	105.33	106.63	(1.22) %
* USD 100 = 100			
Euro-Currency Interest Rates*			
Currency	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months
U.S. Dollar	5.43	5.06	5.37
Swiss Franc	6.19	5.64	6.19
Deutsche Mark	3.48	3.23	3.48
Swiss Franc	1.62	1.57	1.60
French Franc	4.34	4.39	4.44
Japanese Yen	0.32	0.49	0.31
* USD 100 = 100			
Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin			
Currency	Jan. 26, 1996	Jan. 26, 1996	Jan. 26, 1996
U.S. Dollar	0.7080	0.7100	0.7100
Swiss Franc	1.0640	1.0675	1.0675
Deutsche Mark	0.4747	0.4777	0.4777
Swiss Franc	0.5549	0.5678	0.5678
French Franc	0.1379	0.1386	0.1386
Japanese Yen	0.6635	0.6608	0.6608
Dutch Guilder	0.4234	0.4255	0.4255
Swedish Krona	-	-	-
Italian Lira	0.0443	0.0445	0.0445
Belgian Franc	-	-	-
* Per 100			

A review of news from the Arabic press

Jordan to receive \$350m aid, loans from EU this year

★ JORDAN WILL receive \$350 million in aid and loans on concessionary terms from the European Union (EU) this year, Finance Minister Basel Jarrah has said. Of the amount, he said, \$140 million will be non-refundable grants. These funds will consolidate the balance of payments situation as well as the hard currency reserves which, in turn, would support the stability of the Jordanian dinar (Al Aswaq).

JD 33.7 million tenders in the offing

★ THE GOVERNMENT Tenders Directorate is due to float three major tenders worth JD 33.7 million over the next few weeks. Two tenders will cover a water purification station at Wadi Al Arab and an expansion of grain silos in Irbid. The third will be for a waste-water duct for Greater Irbid sanitation system. The Wadi Al Arab project is expected to cost JD 18 million while the cost for the silos project is envisaged at about JD 10 million (Al Dastour).

Present location of port in Aqaba to become free zone after 15 years

★ THE PORT area of Aqaba will be gradually moved over the next 15 years from its present location to a new location on the southern shore at an approximate cost of JD 80 million, the deputy general manager of the Ports Corporation, Aqef Abu Tayeb, has said. The present port area, he added, will become an international free zone that will not be subjected to any customs measures or fees. Mr. Abu Tayeb explained that the zone will be a permanent area that will include all kinds of commercial activities and will be able to attract Arab and foreign capital.

The Port Corporation officials revealed that Jordan had received offers from four international investment parties to build docks, quays and industrial projects at the new port site. The offers came from a Japanese-Jordanian company and a Jordanian-Indian company, Mr. Abu Tayeb said noting that Dutch parties intend to present similar projects soon. In addition, he added, Italy is seeking to win a vital investment project that aims at expanding industrial quays for exporting table salt.

Mr. Abu Tayeb indicated that after shifting the marine export and import operations to the new location at the southern shore, the present port will be transformed into an open free port to be used as permanent showrooms to promote international marine and commercial activities involving vessels, cars, machines and industrial and electrical equipment, to activate the business climate in the area and the country as a whole.

A Japanese study, due for completion by the mid of February, has laid down new bases to upgrade the efficiency of the port and the services provided in the handling, loading and unloading of cargo. The study offered recommendations to double the volume of goods transported and to establish new quays for passengers and cargo in addition to expanding either quays such as that used for containers.

The port at the new location will have a Qatari financed gas terminal, which Qatar will use to sell to Israel and Europe (Al Ra'i).

Islamic endowment investments total JD 44m spread over 16 projects

★ ISLAMIC ENDOWMENT investments, managed by the Waqf (endowment) investment and development directorate at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, totalled JD 44 million last year. According to sources at the ministry, the investments were spread over 16 projects at various areas in the Kingdom. The ministry's main project at this time is the commercial complex on Saqf Al Sail street in downtown Amman. This project will be set up on a 5,700-square-metre area in two stages. The first stage will be a nine-storey building (area 45,000 square metres) that will include a produce market, stores and parking areas. The other stage will be commercial offices and parking areas covering 30,000 square metres in area (Al Aswaq).

Financial Jordan Times

Foreign Exchange Market Summary (January 22-January 26, 1996)

AMMAN — The U.S. unit appreciated against other major currencies last week. It ended the week 1.22 per cent higher against the yen, 0.75 per cent higher against the mark and 0.46 per cent higher against sterling.

The dollar depreciated marginally against the mark and sterling Monday, while rising slightly against the yen. Reports indicated that dealers took their profits on their long dollar positions after the Group of Seven meeting ended without a strong statement to support the dollar. Comments by the House majority leader that any congressional bill to increase the U.S. debt ceiling should include Republican conditions also weighed on the dollar and prompted fears that the U.S. might default on its debt.

The U.S. unit appreciated against the mark and the yen Tuesday, however, while depreciating marginally against sterling. Reports indicated that the dollar rose against the mark on renewed expectations that the Bundesbank might ease its monetary policy soon. These expectations were fuelled by a Bundesbank council member, who said that the cycle of lower German interest rates may not have ended. He also added that the dollar could strengthen once the U.S. budget conflict is resolved.

The dollar surged against the yen Wednesday, while appreciating modestly against the mark and sterling. The dollar rocketed above the 107 yen level for the first time in 23 months after the New York Times reported that China had issued threats of military action against Taiwan. The dollar was also supported against the yen when Japan reported that its 1995 trade surplus with the United States, as well as the overall surplus, fell for the first time in five years.

The U.S. unit witnessed modest gains against the mark and sterling Thursday, while depreciating against the yen. Analysts indicated that the dollar gained strength on the perception that the German government officials would like a higher dollar to stimulate economic growth in Germany. Reports indicated that the dollar reached a high of 1.4927 when U.S. and German government officials stated that they welcomed marks a higher dollar against the mark.

The dollar continued to rise against other major currencies at the end of the week. The dollar benefited from dealers' perception that the U.S. administration and the Congress are working to resolve their disputes. The dollar also gained ground on comments by a member of the Bundesbank Council, who indicated that the mark is overvalued against the dollar.

The U.S. unit, thus, ended the week at 1.4915 marks, 106.63 yen and at \$1.5035 to the pound.

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Relaxed Becker breaks Grand Slam drought

MELBOURNE (Agencies) — A cool, calm and collected Boris Becker ended a five-year Grand Slam drought at the Australian Open here on Sunday, proving far too powerful for American Michael Chang in a four-set victory.

The fourth-seeded German, whose last Grand Slam title was here in 1991, overwhelmed the diminutive Chang 6-2, 6-4, 2-6, 6-2, and threw his arms up in delight when his opponent's final backhand went well out.

The two-hour 33-minute match never reached great heights as a relaxed Becker, showing little of the anguish that has marked

Slam title.

The super-mobile Chang, 23, tried hard as he always does, running himself into the ground to take the fourth set, and astonishingly, with his new, longer racquet, sending down 11 aces in the match, the same number as Becker.

But the bigger serve and volley game of the 1.9 metre (6ft 3ins) Becker prevailed, maintaining the high-quality tennis that gave him straight sets victories over Mark Woodforde and number six seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov in the two previous rounds.

Becker, who like Chang first won a Grand Slam title when he was only 17,

tough five-setters over Britain's Greg Rusedski and Sweden's Thomas Johansson in the first two rounds.

"I did not win a match in three years... I was close (to losing) this year again, don't ask me why."

His form after that was stunning with the unseeded Australian Woodforde, his unlikely semifinal opponent, suggesting even God would have found it difficult to win.

Chang, a devout Christian, agreed Becker on current form was just too good. "I think that today I went out and I gave my best shot but Boris was just better than I was," said Chang, who did not drop a set on the way to the final and had been confident of winning a second



Boris Becker of Germany holds the Australian Open trophy and a souvenir kangaroo after his win against Michael Chang of the U.S. (Reuters photo)

take a 2-1 lead. He broke again in the seventh game to take a seemingly unassailable 5-2 lead and then won the next three points on his serve to set up a trio of match points.

An overstretched Chang, run ragged around the court for much of the match, finally hit a backhand long to surrender the title to a jubilant Becker.

Record crowds for Australian Open

Record crowds watched the Australian Open tennis

14,800. In the past year the size of Flinders Park has almost doubled from six hectares (15 acres) to 11.5 hectares (28 acres).

Eleven new courts were created, including two new show courts, in the 23 million dollar (16.5 million U.S.) development.

It has been partly funded by a state guaranteed loan over 15 years.

Sport is big business in this eastern Australian city at this period of the year.

There were about 10,000 international visitors here for

Australian Open

with 380,000 packing a new look Flinders Park here during the two-week tournament, officials said Sunday.

German campaigner Boris Becker won the men's singles title in fine style Sunday beating American-Chinese star Michael Chang in four sets.

American Monica Seles easily won the women's crown, her fourth win in the Australian Open, on Sunday.

Officials said that attendance at the expanded tennis complex was up 25 per cent this year on 1995 at 389,598. The biggest crowd for a day session was 27,000 and the largest at night matches,

the tennis — the first Grand Slam of the season — and the one-day World Cup cricket competition, said Don Larkin, deputy chief executive officer at the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce.

This ran around the same time and involved Australia, the West Indies and Sri Lanka, and was played at the huge Melbourne Cricket Ground adjoining Flinders Park.

Visitors to the city were spending about \$200 a day on tickets, accommodation, transport, food and entertainment, Larkin said.



Michael Chang of the U.S. reacts to a bad shot during the men's final against Germany's Boris Becker at the Australian Open (Reuters photo)



Boris Becker (right) talks with Michael Chang (left) after the men's final at the Australian Open in Melbourne (Reuters photo)

his career, ran into a two sets to love like a well-oiled machine.

Though dropping the third when his mind appeared to drift elsewhere, he took quick control of the fourth, breaking the athletic American in the third game to set up the set, the match and tournament on his own booming serve.

The 28-year-old world number four feasted on the reception of a packed centre court, joking as he accepted the winner's trophy and a \$415,900 cheque: "I didn't think that I had a Grand Slam left in me."

Becker, who put behind him a run of early-round losses here since his 1991 victory, paid tribute to world number five Chang, who was looking to break a longer drought than Becker — his only Grand Slam title was in 1989 at the French Open.

"With your determination and willpower it's my days that are counting not yours," he said.

Becker, however, with number one seed Pete Sampras dumped in the third round and second-seeded Andre Agassi trounced by Chang in the semifinals, never looked likely to let slip the opportunity of a sixth Grand

Slam title. Becker quickly established his authority, taking the first set in only 30 minutes, wrapping it up with an unplayable 195 km (121 miles) per hour serve down the line.

Becker had won the toss in the warm, still conditions, and his decision to let Chang serve first proved the right one as he broke the American twice to move to a 4-0 lead.

Becker then took the second set 6-4 in a closer tussle that the German eventually won on his seventh break point to put himself in a dominant position to take the match.

But Becker's concentration faltered and Chang lifted his own game, playing near-flawless tennis to break Becker for the first time in the match to take a 3-0 lead, then breaking him again six games later to take the set 6-2 in 33 minutes.

Chang, who had lost three of his four previous encounters against Becker, employed superb defensive tactics, chasing down every ball and relying on Becker to make mistakes.

But Becker pulled his game together in the fourth set, the first vital break coming controversially at 1-1 when the chair umpire called a Chang backhand out to give Becker his first break point.

The German took his chance immediately, hitting a powerful backhand to draw the error from Chang and

Grand Slam title.

thanked his wife Barbara for the new hunger and focus that secured him his victory.

In contrast to his title win in 1991 when he promptly ran out of the stadium to be on his own in the local park, Becker stayed on court and later talked about the new balance in his life.

"I am in the autumn of my career and I am not taking anything for granted... I still believe I have a couple more big ones in me," he told a post-match news conference.

"As long as my wife and son (two-year-old Noah) are there and I am supported, and it does not look like I am embarrassing myself in shorts, then I am going to do it," he added.

Becker, still trying to come to grips with his victory, said he had one last goal, the French Open, which he would like to add to his three Wimbledon, two Australian and U.S. titles.

"It's a dream of mine, obviously," he said. "I am going to chase it... I am going to give it a try."

Becker had already exorcised the demons that saw his early exit from the Open over the last few years, by surviving two

Manchester United reach last 16

LONDON (AFP) — Manchester United were the only side to reach the last 16 after Cup specialists Everton and Tottenham both drew at home to first division opponents in the FA Cup fourth round on Saturday.

Siberian weather conditions made it the worst-hit football programme since 1963 with United's match one of only three of the 14 Cup ties to escape the big freeze. But goals from Ryan Giggs, Paul Parker and Eric Cantona saw them overcome a potentially tricky trip to Reading to run out 3-0 winners.

But there was a last minute shock for Everton, who beat United 1-0 in last year's final, in a dramatic home encounter with minnows Port Vale.

Five times Cup winners Everton, who needed a replay against second division Stockport in the previous round, twice took the lead but once again failed to kill off their never-say-die opponents — appropriately nicknamed the "Valiants".

The struggling first division outfit fell behind to Nigerian star Daniel Amokachi's 40th-minute effort, drew level throughout Martin Foyle's strike after 59 minutes but looked to be going out when former prisoner Duncan Ferguson put Everton 2-1 ahead with just two minutes remaining.

Ian Bogie, though, silenced the celebrations of the home supporters by firing home another equaliser in the dying seconds with a de-

flected long-range strike in deservedly give the Valiants a replay.

Port Vale are one of the poor relations of English football and manager John Rudge, the second longest serving manager in the league, welcomed the financial boost the replay will bring.

He said: "The chairman will be pleased because money is tight. It might give us a boost and put a few more pennies in the till."

Everton boss Joe Royle said: "I couldn't deny them their right to a replay. I thought we had won it at 2-1 but there were too many collective off-days for us."

Manchester United, who lost 1-0 to Everton in last year's final, showed why the bookmakers had installed them as 5-1 Cup favourites.

Reading gave Alex Ferguson's multi-million pound team a torrid time in the opening stages but failed to take their chances. United then moved up a gear to produce the class which saw them through against Sunderland in the last round.

Giggs, the best player on show, settled United's nerves with the opening goal on 36 minutes, substitute Parker netted a second after 56 minutes — just three minutes after entering the fray — with a shot that appeared to be intended as a cross.

French star Cantona killed off Reading completely with a last-minute strike.

United boss Alex Ferguson said: "The only message you

can get across to the players on a day like today is to keep it sensible but after 15 minutes I couldn't see us losing."

Ferguson also praised Parker, whose first touch brought a booking and his second goal, saying: "He's the only one who listened to me — I said this was a game to shoot on sight."

Giggs added: "He (Parker) keeps trying to tell everyone that he does that all the time in training — we all think he meant to cross it."

Tottenham, like United aiming for a record ninth FA Cup triumph, looked to be continuing their red-hot Premiership form when they welcomed first division strugglers Wolves to White Hart Lane.

Full-back Clive Wilson gave the home side a 13th-minute lead but Wolves were level 15 minutes later when striker Don Goodman made it 1-1 with his 16th goal of the season.

Goodman's persistence paid off after a dreadful mix-up between Dean Austin and goalkeeper Ian Walker as both went for a backpass but Austin misread the situation, the ball spun off Walker to Goodman who slotted it home.

Spurs needed two games to dispose of third division Hereford in the previous round and manager Gerry Francis could not hide his disappointment, saying: "We seem to like doing things the hard way. We made hard work of it."

African Nations' Cup

Yeboah puts Ghana into semis

PORT ELIZABETH (AFP) — Ghana edged out 10-man Zaire 1-0 in their low-quality African Nations Cup quarter-final here on Sunday.

Ghana's Anthony Yeboah hit the winner in the 23rd minute, shortly after Zaire defender Ntelo Lembi was sent off for akung-fu style kick on Abedi Pele.

Violence from Zaire was a feature of the first half, but Yeboah's goal was enough to book their semi-final against South Africa in Johannesburg on Wednesday evening. Mollam Yahaya floated the ball into the 'box, and Pele got to the by-line before cutting the ball back. Yeboah darted into the six-yard box and, at full-stretch, just got his left foot to the ball to guide it home.

Meanwhile Zambia had a golden 20 minutes during the second half to beat Egypt 3-1, taking advantage of a tactical blunder, to reach the semi-finals of the African Nations Cup.

Egypt's Samir Kamouna struck just before the break, but Elijah Litana, Vincem Mutali and Dennis Lota all scored for Zambia after Egypt coach Ruud Krol made a strategic error.

Krol brought on defender Fawzi Gamal in place of striker Aly Maher in the 56th minute in a tactical manoeuvre to preserve their lead.

But, Krol's strategy badly misfired as Zambia scored three goals in the next 20 minutes.

Zambia have a great chance of making the final. They play the winner of the weakest quarter-final, Tunisia/Gabon, at Durban on Wednesday afternoon.

Cup diary
Ghana bus drama: Ghana

were shaken up by a bus incident on their journey from Bloemfontein to Port Elizabeth for their quarter-final against Zaire, according to the Sunday Times here. Striker Ayew Kwame said their bus skidded in rainy conditions near Bloemfontein airport on Friday. He added the bus shook so violently the wheels left the ground. No one was hurt, but Kwame added: "We were shocked."

Makalalane abuse: South Africa's Augustine Makalalane has been booed throughout the African Nations Cup virtually every time he gets the ball. The FC Zurich midfielder started their 1-0 defeat by Egypt on Wednesday, but coach Clive Barker had little choice but to substitute him. Barker added he is unlikely to use Makalalane again in the tournament because of the abuse given him by the crowd. Makalalane's unpopularity comes from what a section of the crowd believes is his unexciting style of play.

Pele's Torino TV snub: Abedi Pele, stranded in South Africa with a stomach injury, could not bare to watch Torino against Fiorentina last Sunday. Pele 31, could not return to Italy from the African Nations Cup because of a stomach injury.

Although his teammates watched the match live on television, Pele, though he asked about the score from time to time, could not bring himself to watch the match. "He was so disappointed not to be there," said Ghana's media liaison officer Henk Ferreira.

Ghana's compact disc shopping spree: Compact discs are top of the Ghanaian team's

shopping list, according to media liaison officer Henk Ferreira at the African Nations Cup. He said mellow soul, reggae and calypso music was the most popular with western hard rock or pop music not much in demand.

Family man Saib: Moussa Saib arrived for an interview with a journalist from Johannesburg's Saturday Star talking into a cellphone. The conversation lasted about 15 minutes and Algeria's most well-known player continually shrugged as if apologising for something. Maybe a deal with his agent over a hitch? "It's my mother," said the 26-year-old Auxerre midfielder, who added his whole family had been eager to talk to him.

Favourites Ghana: Ghana are the bookmakers' African Nations Cup favourites as well as being tipped for the title by most well-informed football observers. South Africa's Glenn Sepel bookmakers have made them 2/1 to take the title.

Tinkler's big goal: South Africa's tough midfielder Eric Tinkler is not there to score goals, but he would love to find the net for his country. The 25-year-old Victoria Seabur player nearly managed it in their 1-0 victory over Angola. His first free-kick hit a post and his second could only be parried by the Angolan keeper before Mark Williams knocked home the rebound. "If I contribute towards a goal I feel good, but to score for one's country is everyone's dream," said Tinkler, rumoured to be the target of English and Italian clubs.

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3P Pass 4P Pass
4P Pass 6P Pass

Opening lead Queen of A

You do not need to be a master mathematician to play good bridge. But you have to know something about the odds to let you choose between alternative lines to bring home a good slam. While we do not like a jump raise with only three-card support, the trump quality was attractive and, after South showed slam interest, North painted outside strength and South went straight to six hearts.

West led the queen of spades, which held, and shifted to a diamond. That suggested that trumps were going to break 3-2 — had the split been 4-1, the defenders could have put declarer under a lot of pressure by simply continuing spades to reduce South's trump length.

The obvious line was to rely on the club finesse. If that succeeded, declarer would ruff the third club in dummy and lose only one spade trick. Chances of any finesse succeeding are a strength 50 percent.

Given a 3-2 trump split, there was a more attractive way to get home. Chances of a 4-3 spade break were better than 50 percent, and that could be combined with a dummy reversal.

Declarer won the diamond shift in dummy and pulled a spade high A trump to the time was the entry for a spade ruff, and the queen of diamonds was the entry to trump a third spade with the ace of trumps, which set up dummy king of spades. There was still a trump in the closed hand to get to the table to draw the outstanding trumps. Dummy's losing club went away on the long diamond. In all, declarer scored three trump tricks, three spade ruffs, four diamonds, the king of spades and the ace of clubs. Compliments of the season to all our readers!

Former Redskins coach in Hall of Fame

PHOENIX (R) — Former Washington Redskins coach Joe Gibbs, who led his team to four Super Bowls and won three, was elected to the pro football Hall of Fame on Saturday.

Gibbs heads a list of five new members elected on the eve of Super Bowl XXX for enshrinement in July.

Joining Gibbs in the class of 1996 are wide receiver Charlie Joiner, defensive back Mel Renfro, offensive lineman Dan Dierdorf and offensive lineman Lou Creekmur, who played for the Detroit Lions in the 1950s and was elected as a seniors candidate.

Gibbs was head coach of the Redskins for 12 years and was named NFL coach of the year in 1982, 1983 and 1991.

Known for his shrewd halftime adjustments and for out-coaching many of his peers, Gibbs is the only coach to win three Super Bowls with three different quarterbacks — Joe Theismann, Doug Williams and Mark Rypien.

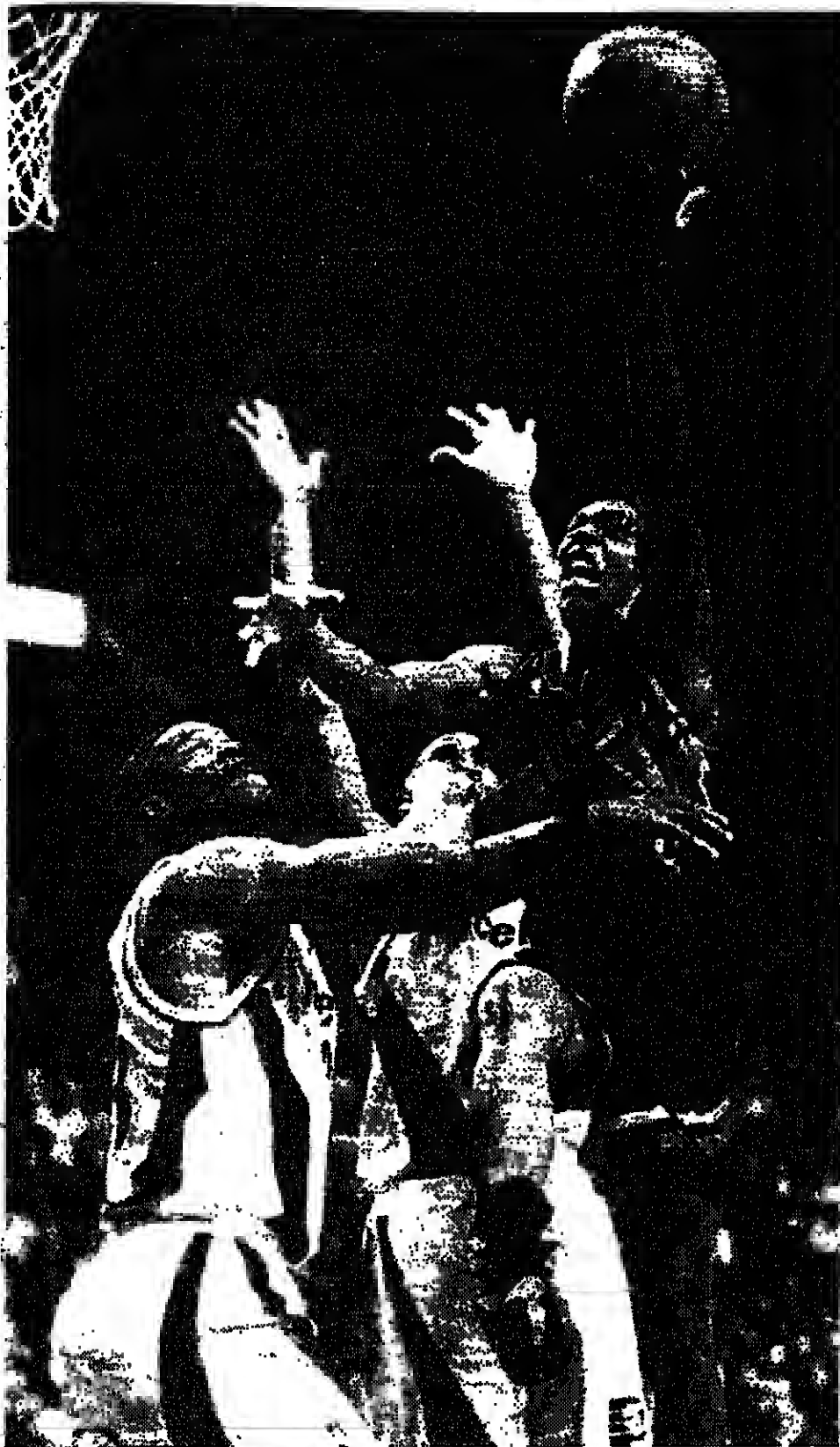
"It's real neat to go in a class with Charlie Joiner and Dan Dierdorf, two players I coached. Those guys helped me keep my job," joked Gibbs.

"I had excellent football players around me all the time. Joiner, who played for the Houston Oilers, Cincinnati Bengals and San Diego Chargers, lasted 18 seasons in the NFL, more than any receiver in history."

He is fifth on the all-time receptions list with 750 — 65 to touchdowns — and was a three-time Pro Bowl selection.

"I'm glad for Joe Gibbs. He was my coach for two years," said Joiner, who had Gibbs as an assistant coach in San Diego.

"If it wasn't for coach Gibbs and (Don) Coryell putting it that passing game, I might not be in the Hall of Fame. Da Fouts might not be in. Kellen Winslow might not be in," said Joiner, who amassed 12,146 receiving yards.



Phoenix Suns forward goes up for the basket against two unidentified opponents (Reuters photo)

Pacers upset Magic 102-79

INDIANAPOLIS (R) — The Orlando Magic, invincible at home, did their befuddling disappearing act once again in the road Saturday as they fell to the Pacers 102-79.

Rik Smits scored nine of his 18 points in a first-quarter run as Indiana stormed to a 12-16 lead which they extended to 63-39 at the half as they cruised to their sixth straight win.

The Magic, a mighty 21-0 at home this season, fell to 12-12 on the road. Shaquille O'Neal scored 23 points for the losers.

"We showed the first quarter that we can play well together," said Smits. "We defended well, we rebounded well and we made our shots." Indiana extended its franchise-record home winning streak to 14 games and beat the Magic for the sixth straight time at home in the regular season, including the playoffs. Indiana has won 10 straight over the Magic at Market Square Arena.

"It was a case of them playing better than we did," Orlando coach Brian Hill said. "I give the Pacers credit."

At New Jersey, Elden Campbell scored put Vlade Divac's miss into the basket with one-tenth of a second remaining, to lift the Los Angeles Lakers to a 100-98 win over the Nets.

"I didn't know the last shot was good until I saw the referee's reaction," said Campbell, who scored 20 points.

Cedric Ceballos scored 29 points for the Lakers, who nearly blew a 13-point fourth-quarter lead but held on to win their third straight victory and seventh in eight games.

Bradley had 19 points and Vernon Gilliam 16 for the Nets.

In Houston, Clyde Drexler had 24 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists as the Houston Rockets pulled away in the third quarter and defeated

the Detroit Pistons 105-85.

Drexler, who recorded his 19th career triple-double, scored 11 points in the third quarter as Houston used a 17-5 run to take a 75-59 advantage entering the final period.

"For a senior citizen, it's pretty good," Drexler said. Grant Hill scored 26 points for the Pistons.

In New York, Patrick Ewing had 28 points, 10 rebounds and five blocks as the Knicks halted a three-game home losing streak with a 104-95 winover the Minnesota Timberwolves.

At Utah, Karl Malone scored eight of his 25 points in a third-quarter run and Antoine Carr added 15 as the Utah Jazz cruised to a 108-91

victory over the Golden State Warriors.

At Los Angeles, Gary Payton and Hersey Hawkins each scored 23 points and keyed a late run as the Seattle SuperSonics rallied to their fourth straight win, 96-87 over the Clippers.

Shawn Kemp had 16 points and 11 rebounds and Payton added eight assists for Seattle.

Terry Dehere scored 18 points for Los Angeles.

In Denver, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf scored all 21 of his points in the second half, including 11 in a 17-5 run that broke the game open in the third quarter and lifted the Denver Nuggets to a 93-82 victory over the Toronto Raptors.

NBA RESULTS

Charlotte	110	Philadelphia	105
Miami	102	Cleveland	85
Indiana	102	Orlando	79
LA Lakers	100	New Jersey	98
New York	104	Minnesota	95
Washington	102	Vancouver	77
Portland	112	Dallas	103
Houston	105	Detroit	85
Denver	93	Toronto	82
Utah	108	Golden State	91
Seattle	96	LA Clippers	87

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Premier League roundup Ahli secure place with 1-0 win over Ramtha

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Kingdom's top soccer teams surprised and upset their fans as the 19th week of the Premier League soccer championship was concluded late Saturday night.

Al Ahli secured their place in the division and moved up two places to 6th after scoring a 1-0 win over leaders Al Ramtha.

Al Ahli's win was crucial after lagging near the relegation zone for most of the competition which concludes in three weeks.

The result cut Al Ramtha's lead to one point before facing former champions Al Faisali in the upcoming week.

Titleholders Al Wihdat lost a chance to take the lead after they were held to a 2-2 draw with 5th placed Al Qadissieh. Al Wihdat were playing without four key players, Youssef Ammouri, Isam Mahmoud, Marwan Shammali and Naser Ghandour.

Third-placed Al Faisali on the other hand lost their bid for the crown after they were held to surprising 0-0 draw with Al Jazireh who fell one place to 8th after maintaining a halfway standing throughout most of the competition.

Another team that also drew were Al Hussein who fell back to 7th after a 1-1 draw with Kufirsoum who remained fourth.

Al Baqaa's 4-0 win over last placed Russeifa improved their overall points but remained in 9th place among the relegation-threatened last four.

10th and 11th placed Al Jalil and Sahab drew 4-4. Both teams became the first three to drop alongside winless Russeifa who have 0 points in the overall standings.

STANDINGS AFTER 19th week

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Ramtha	19	12	4	3	29	7	40
Wihdat	19	11	6	2	35	18	39
Faisali	19	10	6	3	32	12	36
Kufirsoum	19	9	8	2	28	17	35
Qadissieh	19	9	5	5	29	18	32
Ahli	19	7	7	5	27	20	28
Hussein	19	7	7	5	32	17	28
Jazireh	19	7	6	6	33	24	27
Baqaa	19	6	3	10	28	42	21
Sahab	19	2	9	8	18	30	15
Jalil	19	2	3	14	24	54	9
Russeifa	19	-	-	19	15	77	-

Paris St. Germain move six points clear

PARIS (R) — French league leaders Paris St. Germain moved six points clear on Saturday with a 2-1 win over Cannes thanks to a double strike from Patrice Loko.

The Parisians extended their unbeaten run to 14 games but were far from impressive early on against a determined Cannes side, struggling against relegation.

Loko picked up a loose ball, after a shot by right back Jose Cobos had been parried, to open the scoring just before the break and a second by the striker on the hour put the issue beyond doubt.

Cannes, former club of Paris St. Germain trainer Luis Fernandez, scored through Laurent Charvet 10 minutes from time. PSG, boosted by the re-

turn of central defender Alain Roche after a five-month absence with a serious knee injury, have 51 points after 23 games, six more than Auxerre, who moved up to second place when they beat Le Havre 1-0.

A goal from midfielder Sabri Lemouchi, capped by France for the first time in a friendly against Portugal on Wednesday, in the 26th

minute gave Auxerre all three points.

Metz dropped to third when their home game against Lyon was called off because of a frozen pitch. They are seven points behind the leaders with a game in hand.

Fourth-placed Lens lost ground when they went down 2-1 at Rennes whose goals were scored by Jean-Pierre Cyprien and Pierre-

Yves Andre.

Monaco stayed fifth after a disappointing 0-0 draw in Lille. Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson had a miscellaneou match for Monaco, missing a penalty and then getting set off.

Struggling Bordeaux recovered from a goal down at halftime to beat Gueugnon 3-1, giving themselves a little breathing space just above the relegation zone.

Wilander reportedly tests positive for drugs

MELBOURNE (R) — The International Tennis Federation (ITF) refused on Sunday to confirm a British media story that two leading players had tested positive for cocaine at a Grand Slam event.

The report by the News of the World alleged that former world number one Mats Wilander and Czech Karel Novacek had tested positive at last year's French Open.

The newspaper said Wilander and Novacek had denied taking drugs and hired leading international lawyers in a bid to clear their names.

While ITF president Brian Tobin refused to confirm the report, he told a news conference: "If there were no positive tests, the lawyers wouldn't be talking to anybody, would they?"

Wilander, who has won seven Grand Slams, last year finished in the top 50 for the first time since 1990.

"We don't comment on any individual tests or results," said Tobin, speaking on the last day of the Australian Open here.

"The ITF won't be making any comment on this story until or unless there is an outcome, which requires a penalty."

"It's unfair to any athlete to comment until they've had an opportunity to clear themselves or not clear themselves."

Tobin said there was an ITF appeal process which was handled by an independent appeals board.

The News of the World said Wilander and Novacek would refute the authenticity of the tests and the way they were carried out at a laboratory in France.

"Only a handful of tennis officials know about the tests," the newspaper said. "They have been sworn to keep the results secret while the furious legal battle rages."

Neither Wilander, world number one in 1988, nor Novacek, holder of 13 titles and a former world number eight, played in the year's first grand slam event in Australia.

The News of the World said they pulled out of the event claiming they were injured and flew to London with their lawyers for talks with the ITF and the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP).

Tobin said there had been about 1,000 drug tests done in tennis last year. "They are random tests, we don't test at every event."

New look for Spartak Moscow

MOSCOW (AFP) — Spartak Moscow have packed their bags and left Russia, in the hope of putting weeks of pressure behind them this weekend as their reformed squad prepare for European Cup action.

The team left for a 10-day training trip to Israel after a stormy Christmas period that has continued into late January.

"I hate to say this, but I'm glad we're leaving Moscow," said Georgy Yartsev, officially introduced as Spartak's new head coach on Monday. He replaces Oleg Romant-

sev, who remains as team president.

"There are so many distractions here — the fans, the media and everybody else seems to have an opinion on how Spartak should run its business," Yartsev said from Spartak's Tarasovka training centre, just north of Moscow.

Spartak's bosses have been severely criticised in the media for losing most of their top players before the all-

important European Champions Cup quarter-final first leg against France's Nantes on March 7.

Barely a month after its last European encounter on December 6, the team who had won the Russian championship in three of the previous four seasons suddenly found itself without six key members — all of them internationals.

Team captain Viktor Onopko, Sergei Yuran, Vasily Kulikov and goalkeeper Stanislav Cherchesov had all transferred to foreign clubs, while Dmitry Khlestov broke his right leg in two places in an indoor match in Germany on January 6 against Saint Pauli.

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6th French test could be final

PARIS (AFP) — France was expected to announce in the next few days whether its sixth nuclear test, conducted Saturday night under Fangatafa atoll in the South Pacific, will be the last.

The announcement could be made soon by President Jacques Chirac after evaluation by scientists who say they need at least 48 hours to reach a verdict on the success of the test, which, at nearly 120 kilotonnes, was the most powerful in the series that began on Sept. 5 last year.

The announcement could be made before a visit starting Thursday by Mr. Chirac to the United States, which has opposed the resumption of French tests.

Mr. Chirac said earlier this month that the series would be completed before the end of February and earlier had stated that the number of tests might be reduced to six from the eight originally announced.

A defence ministry communiqué that announced the test said that like its predecessors, it was intended to "guarantee the security and effectiveness" of French nuclear weaponry.

But because of its power, it was believed intended to validate the TN-75 warhead to be fitted on missile-launching nuclear submarines.

On Oct. 2, France carried out a test of comparable power — less than 110 kilotonnes — and three weeks later tested a device of less than 60 kilotonnes, both believed intended to verify the TN-75 warhead.

Failing available scientific data, the power of the latest test could suggest that the results of the two tests in October were not sufficiently conclusive or that Saturday's test has put the finishing touches to development of the new warhead.

When he announced the resumption of testing last June, ending a three-year moratorium, Mr. Chirac pledged France to signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), currently being negotiated in Geneva

and due to be ready before the end of the year.

France has also announced its backing for a "zero option" on testing, under which tests of less than one kilotonne would be banned by the CTBT, in a bid to calm international protests.

These resumed on Sunday with Asian and Pacific nations reacting angrily to the sixth test and demanding assurances from Paris that there would be no further atomic explosions.

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating criticised the timing and the message of the test, detonated at 2130 GMT Saturday.

His condemnation was followed by similar messages from New Zealand, Japan and the Philippines. The United States, Austria, and Norway also expressed dismay that the test went ahead.

Mr. Keating expressed anger that the test occurred during CTBT negotiations, and called on the French government to immediately announce the end of its testing programme, sign the protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, and put all its energy towards the successful conclusion of the CTBT this year.

"Such an irresponsible action sends the worst possible signal to nations that aspire to possess nuclear weapons, and damages efforts to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation," he said.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jim Bolger said the nuclear test programme had been "outrageous" and called on Mr. Chirac to make good his vow of support for an international ban on testing.

"The aim of the world must be to stop nuclear testing forever and as a step in that direction, France must close its testing sites in the Pacific for all time," he said.

Japan's new prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, said the test was "very regrettable," and the Jiji Press agency quoted him as saying "we must put an end" to French testing.



A French military video shows a white shockwave as France detonates the sixth of its underground nuclear weapons test at the Fangatafa atoll in the South Pacific (Reuters photo)

Bahrain secure despite unrest — premier

MANAMA (Agencies) — Bahrain's prime minister has given assurances that the country was secure while the Interior Ministry announced 17 new arson attacks linked to a recent wave of political unrest.

"The situation is completely reassuring in Bahrain, where security is being maintained thanks to the police in coordination with various groups among the population," Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa told the official GNA news agency late Saturday.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Interior Ministry announced that there had been 17 new fire bombings throughout the country on Thursday and Friday.

The fires struck two cars in Manama, 10 electric substations, a children's garden in Hamad town and a farm in Sadad. Several butane gas cylinders were damaged by civilian defence squads before exploding, the official added.

He also said that a total of

180 people had been arrested in connection with the recent wave of political violence that has swept the country.

"We will never allow any group of people who are wrongly induced to light fire to or destroy the nation's property, or threaten the interests of its people," the prime minister added.

Lawyers said there had been 2,000 arrests in recent political violence which flared again after several months of calm in the country.

The Interior Ministry stated said:

"The security forces, anxious to protect citizens, residents and their properties and to preserve security and stability, are continuing their extensive measures to chase and arrest elements responsible for fires and sabotage."

The Interior Ministry said on Wednesday that it was holding 544 people, including 174 arrested in recent disturbances.

Anti-government protests by some Shiite Muslims

erupted in December 1994 to demand the release of political prisoners and the restoration of parliament dissolved in 1975. The unrest faded last April but resumed this month.

Bahrain on Saturday denied reports by a London-based opposition group that Shiite Muslim opposition leaders detained on charges of inciting protests against the Sunni-led government had staged a hunger strike.

"Reports of hunger strikes by some of the detainees is incorrect. They are regularly provided with medical check-ups and are given health care attention," an official source told Reuters.

Officials also said the prisoners were receiving medical treatment and could have family visits twice a week.

The Bahrain Freedom Movement, an exiled opposition group, charged that two Bahraini Shiite leaders, Abdul Wahab Hussein and Hassan Musheibmah, were being force-fed at a military hospital in Bahrain since Friday after going on hunger

strike.

According to Saturday's statement, the main Shiite opposition leader, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri, was also hospitalised because of his deteriorating health.

The three opposition leaders also went on hunger strike in October.

Pakistan supports Bahrain's crackdown on political unrest here and opposes foreign interference in its domestic affairs, Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmad Ali said in remarks published Sunday.

The minister made the remarks to the official Gulf News Agency following a 24-hour visit to Bahrain during which he handed the emir, Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifa, a message from Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

"Pakistan opposes any foreign interference in the internal affairs of Bahrain and states of the region and supports all steps taken by the authorities to maintain security and stability," Mr. Ahmad Ali said.

Rabin killer remains defiant

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — The confessed assassin of Yitzhak Rabin on Sunday defiantly defended the killing of the former prime minister as a political act against a "terrorist," throwing defence lawyers' plans into disarray.

"I acted like a soldier who has just killed a terrorist in Lebanon," Yigal Amir, 25, told the three-judge panel led by Edmond Levy, as he explained how he could gun down Mr. Rabin in cold blood.

"I am not a criminal. I acted from ideology and I have not come to defend myself, but to explain my act," he told the third hearing in his trial on charges of premeditated murder and assault.

The prosecution submitted as evidence the gun used by Amir to shoot Mr. Rabin at a Nov. 4 peace rally in Tel Aviv and called police officer Matti Sirtzi who interviewed the law student after the assassination as its first witness.

Amir had told him that everything he did "was because of the Din Moser," an obsolete Jewish religious law which authorises the death of anyone endangering Jewish property or land.

"He never stopped smiling while he was explaining why he did it. That's what shocked me the most," said Mr. Sirtzi.

"He asked me if he could have some food and I told him, 'do you see us eating?'" he said then, "well, give me some cookies," and I said firmly, 'we don't have any cookies.'"

"Then he said, 'well, then let's raise a toast,'" the policeman said.

Amir, a religious Jew opposed to Mr. Rabin's peace moves with Palestinians, was clearly toasting the prime minister's death. Mr. Naftali added.

A third-year law student, Amir virtually took over his own defence on Sunday, the second day of his Tel Aviv trial, after one of his lawyers quit and the other was scolded by a judge for being unprepared.

Attorney Mordechai Ofri said he was quitting because he had been denied control of the case and was short on funds for a psychologist and other professional witnesses.

When attorney Jonathan Ray Goldberg complained of not having received all the state's material needed to present a defence, Judge Levi — having already granted two delays — told Mr. Goldberg:

"If you ask me more time for a delay I will consider forcing you to pay all the court expenses. The negligence in which you are handling this case is unbelievable."

Amir, wearing a black religious skullcap, smiled widely for cameramen allowed into the heavily guarded court at the start of the hearing. The judge then gave Amir much of the control, letting him question witnesses even after Mr. Goldberg had done so.

Last week Amir told the court he had meant only to paralyse Mr. Rabin when he shot him. He said he did not intend to kill him — a defence that could mean the difference between a 20-year sentence and life behind bars.

But the state on Sunday tried to portray Amir as cold and calculating.

A videotaped reenactment of the killing was played in the courtroom. At the end of the tape, Amir is seen to say: "I don't regret it. Someone had to do it. It had to be done."

Policeman Avi Aviv testified that when police were taking Amir's fingerprints the night of the killing, Amir asked if they would check whether anyone had found his wristwatch which had fallen off.

During the hearing, Amir asked another interrogator, policeman Ofer Gamliel: "When you were questioning me, what was your impression of my state of mind? Was I angry? Did it look like I was seeking revenge?"

"You said it was not out of vengeance," the policeman said.

"It was your impression that I was agitated or anxious?" Amir asked.

"My impression was that he was as cold as a fish," the officer said, addressing the judges.



Diana's 'mystery man' is 40-year-old tycoon

LONDON (AFP) — A "mystery man" who visits the Princess of Wales at night in her Kensington Palace home is a millionaire property tycoon, Christopher Whalley, the News Of The World reported Sunday. The mass-circulation paper said that Mr. Whalley, 40, was the "man in black" spied on several occasions getting in the back of Princess Diana's car in De Vere Gardens, next to the palace. It published pictures of Mr. Whalley in the early morning in the same street, and leaving Princess Diana's gym club in Chelsea within minutes of the princess, estranged wife of the heir to the British throne. The paper quoted an unnamed friend of the princess as saying, "she's determined that people will not see her out and about with men, even if they are just friends. 'She is being very foolish about Chris. He's a smashing man and they're friends but that's all they are.'"

Separated weaker twin dies after operation

SAN DIEGO (R) — Siamese twins born to an impoverished Mexican couple were surgically separated Saturday but the weaker of the two infants died within hours of the operation. The surviving twin was listed in stable condition, and a hospital spokesman said the prognosis for Sarah Morales was good. "She's doing well, all things considered," Ken Allen said. The twins had been joined at the chest, abdomen and liver. Dr. Allen said the twins' parents had "a lot of emotions to deal with" after losing one of their two babies in an effort to save the other. Dr. John Lamberti, one of the surgeons who volunteered his services at Children's Hospital in San Diego, said the chances had been slim for Sarah Morales, the weaker twin. "She had a heart defect that's probably not compatible with survival and may not have been compatible with a term pregnancy," Dr. Lamberti said.

Don't beep in court

SEOUL (AFP) — Fed-up judges at South Korea's Supreme Court have introduced a new ruling under which anyone whose beeper or mobile phone goes off in court can be jailed for 20 days. Koreans are fanatic mobile phone and beeper carriers, and the new ruling that went into effect Friday provides for a million won (\$1,280) fine or a 20 day stint in prison, the Korea Times warned Saturday. The Times said the court would issue a warning if the forgetful at the start of each "solemn session."

A dog's life ...

PARIS (AFP) — A French woman has been jailed for two months for abandoning her pet dog, the first recorded such sentence judicial sources said. Ann Mouras threw the German shepherd dog in a litter bin near the Arc De Triomphe on Christmas Eve 1995. She was traced from a tag in the dog's ear after it was rescued by passers-by. Our knowledge this is the first such exemplary ruling, said an animal welfare group which brought the case against the woman.

Palestinians trapped in 'catastrophe' between Egypt, Libya, witnesses say

CAIRO (AFP) — Libya, Egypt and Israel have created a "catastrophe" for 200 Palestinians trapped for months in the desert between the Egyptian and Libyan borders, the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) said Sunday.

"This is a human catastrophe. These victims are the direct responsibility of the Libyan, Egyptian and Israeli governments," EOHR Secretary General Negad Al Borai told a press conference in Cairo.

"These Palestinians are paying the price of disputes between Arab governments even though they are not at all involved in them," Mr. Borai said.

"The Libyan government must not use this foreign labour as hostages to reach political ends," he added.

The EOHR and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) both condemned the "inhuman conditions" in the tent camp in no-man's land in which the Palestinians have been stranded since they were thrown out of Libya and refused entry into Egypt.

"They have become prisoners and the camp is a trap," said Khaled Daoud, member of an EOHR mission to the camp on Jan. 15.

Libyan leader Muammar

Qadhafi decided in September to expel the 30,000 Palestinian workers in his country in a bid to swamp the Gaza and West Bank with refugees to show the failure of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) accords with Israel to create a homeland there.

Around a thousand of them ended up stranded in no man's land after Egypt refused them entry, fearing they would stay in the country because Israel would not allow them into the Palestinian territories.

Most have since been allowed back into Libya. But 200, including numerous women and children, have refused to return.

"Conditions on the border are indeed appalling," Panos Muntzis, member of the UNHCR in Cairo, said. "The ground is rocky and every time it rains the water can't be absorbed and it becomes a lake."

The UNHCR and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) responsible for Palestinian refugees, made eight missions to the border between September and December to distribute \$50,000 worth of food, water and health products, Mr. Muntzis said.

"These people have lost their savings. To live they buy cheap products from Libya and sell them in Egypt. Libyan authorities sometimes ignore the trade and sometimes arrest them and confiscate the goods," Mr. Daoud said.

The EOHR called on Egypt to move the refugees to the "Canada Camp" of Palestinian refugees in the town of Rafah on Egypt's border with Gaza.

"Anywhere would be better than where they are now," Mr. Muntzis said.

Mr. Borai said 19 Palestinians are married to Egyptian women and have between them 50 children, but Cairo has refused them entry based on an Egyptian law which denies Egyptian citizenship to children of Egyptians with foreign husbands.

The law is "a flagrant discrimination in the law between men and women," the rights group chief said.

The Palestinians in the camp have no running water or toilets. They must pay a Libyan dinar (\$0.31) to take a shower in a cafe near the Libyan border post of Misad, the EOHR said.

Most of the children suffer "skin disease and various pulmonary problems due to the cold and weather conditions," the group said.

Mandela meets with Farrakhan

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — President Nelson Mandela brushed aside fierce criticism to hold a 4-minute meeting with controversial U.S. black activist Louis Farrakhan, who was beginning a three-day visit to South Africa.

Expected Saturday evening in Johannesburg, the U.S. activist, who heads the radical movement the Nation of Islam, arrived from Zaire on Sunday morning nearly 15 hours late. His private plane had been delayed by bad weather, his delegation said.

On arrival, accompanied by his wife and two of his nine children, Mr. Farrakhan went straight to Mr. Mandela's private residence in Johannesburg.

The president had agreed to postpone the meeting by 2-1/2 hours. Mr. Mandela said he reiterated his commitment to building a South Africa without racism, sexism or a single religion.

"I exposed the fundamental principles on which our policy is based and on which we want to build South Africa," he declared.

The meeting also took place in the presence of Walter Sisulu, a prominent member of the African National Congress (ANC), and the leaders of the Communist Party.

elections held Jan. 30.

Public radio reported Sunday that Mr. Netanyahu wanted the Palestinian question on the agenda of a meeting of the Likud leadership planned in coming weeks.

Mr. Netanyahu, 47, has for the past two years been among the most virulent opponents of the peace agreements which gave the PNA control of the Gaza Strip and West Bank population centres.

And some analysts cautioned that reports of his change of heart could be an electorally motivated manoeuvre designed to draw voters without signalling any fundamental policy shift.

Mr. Netanyahu himself said Saturday that any change

Cairo prepares law to foil litigious Islamists

CAIRO (Agencies) — The Egyptian government has sent parliament a draft law closing the loophole through which Muslim fundamentalists have been sniping at intellectuals.

The legislative committee of parliament approved the amended "hisba" law on Saturday and parliamentary sources said on Sunday it would go to the full house for a vote on Monday.

The amendment makes it much more difficult for lobbyists to harass their ideological opponents through the courts by claiming they are acting in the interests of society as a whole, although they have no personal stake in the case.

Islamists used the principle of hisba, a technical Arabic word meaning "proxy" or "guardianship," to persuade an Egyptian court last year to separate prominent academic Nasr Abu Zaid from his wife against his will.

The Islamists argued that Dr. Abu Zaid's writings made him an infidel and so his marriage to a Muslim woman was invalid.

Other groups of lawyers, posing as guardians of public morality or the public interest, have filed "hisba" suits against Nobel Prize winning novelist Naguib Mahfouz, actress Yusra and the state's antiquities department.

Under the amended law, a "hisba" suit must go first to the office of the public prosecutor, which can then decide whether the case deserves a hearing in the courts.

Either party can appeal against the prosecutor's decision.

The opposition newspaper Al Wafd, in a departure from normal practice, welcomed the government's decision.

Hisba has become a tool in the hands of people seeking fame, of the ossified and of the enemies of free thought, with which to attack, defame and terrorise thinkers and writers," it said.

A human rights group said the planned law fails to go far enough.

"The law does not eliminate hisba and its use as a tool to persecute intellectuals for their opinions and burdening them with the possibility of civil executions," the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA) said.

The draft law "is an important step, but a limited one. The CHRLA sticks by its demand that hisba be removed completely from Egyptian law."

The bill was drawn up after artists pleaded with President Hosni Mubarak to pass legislation following a flurry of cases by Islamist lawyers.

Israel's right wing divided over recognising PNA

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu is considering recognising the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in an election-motivated about-face that could split his right-wing Likud Party, the media reported Sunday.

Mr. Netanyahu, worried that his party's categorical opposition to the peace process could cost it the election, has begun private discussions with Likud colleagues on the possibility of accepting de facto of the Palestinian autonomy accords reached between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Labour government, Israel Radio said.

Such a move is fiercely opposed by the far-right wing of Likud, led by Deputy Ben-

ny Begin, and could prove explosive during party primaries expected in coming weeks ahead of general elections scheduled for October.

But opinion polls indicate there may be little choice for Mr. Netanyahu, who is expected to face incumbent Shimon Peres in Israel's first direct election for prime minister.

A Gallup poll published on Friday showed that more than 59 per cent of Israelis support the agreements granting autonomy to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The poll also showed that if elections were held today, Mr. Peres would win 52.6 per cent of the vote for prime minister, compared to 32.7 per cent for Mr. Netanyahu.

Conscious of the deep hostility felt towards Mr. Arafat within the Israeli right, Mr. Netanyahu has been careful in his public statements, while beginning to hint at a change of position.

"I do not exclude any possible partner in the Arab World. I have often said I would even meet with the most extremist of them like (Libyan leader) Muammar Qadhafi if they renounce their desire to destroy Israel," he told Israeli Radio on Saturday.

Time is pressing for Likud, both due to indications that Mr. Peres could move the elections up to June and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat gained legitimacy following his overwhelming victory in the first Palestinian

elections held Jan. 30.

Public radio reported Sunday that Mr. Netanyahu wanted the Palestinian question on the agenda of a meeting of the Likud leadership planned in coming weeks.

Mr. Netanyahu, 47, has for the past two years been among the most virulent opponents of the peace agreements which gave the PNA control of the Gaza Strip and West Bank population centres.

And some analysts cautioned that reports of his change of heart could be an electorally motivated manoeuvre designed to draw voters without signalling any fundamental policy shift.

Mr. Netanyahu himself said Saturday that any change

of policy towards Mr. Arafat "can only take place once he fundamentally alters his attitude towards Israel."

Under existing peace agreements, Mr. Arafat is committed to changing the charter of his PLO to remove all references to Israel's destruction.

But Mr. Netanyahu said "it is not possible to be satisfied with an amendment to the PLO charter," arguing that Mr. Arafat must also halt all his public references to violence against Israel.

To date only one senior Likud figure, Meir Shearrit, has publicly called for Likud to change its official policy and accept the Palestinian autonomy accords.

He argued that this would refocus the debate on halting

any further moves towards creating an independent Palestinian state and on keeping Jerusalem as the "unified capital" of Israel.

Negotiations between the government and Mr. Arafat's authority on the future of the Palestinian territories including Arab East Jerusalem are due to begin in May.

Mr. Begin, son of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the right-wing ideologist of Likud, has said he will fiercely fight any move by the party leadership to accept the shameful agreements reached with Yasser Arafat, supreme chief of the terrorists.

Another former Likud premier, Yitzhak Shamir, also cast doubt on the wisdom of a policy change.